

## **Guidelines for PA 509: Organizational Experience**

These guidelines address some of the most commonly asked questions about the organizational experience requirement for the MPA, MPA:HA, and MPH:HMP programs. The organizational experience is a culminating experience for each of these programs. It helps the student to build skills of reflective practice to assist in integration and synthesis of program content. Where the experience is required, the student is responsible for obtaining and satisfactorily completing an appropriate organizational experience.

### **Who must complete the PA 509 requirements?**

All MPH:HMP students must complete PA 509. All MPA and MPA:HA students are encouraged to take 509; those who have less than three years of full-time management experience in public, nonprofit or health services organizations **must** complete PA 509. With the approval of their faculty advisor, MPA and MPA:HA students who have at least three years of management experience may waive PA 509 and take PA 512 instead, as well as an elective course approved by their advisor. Please note: PA 512 is not offered every term.

### **What does an organizational experience involve?**

The organizational experience typically involves the student working on an administrative or management issue confronting a public, nonprofit or health services organization. It is an opportunity for the student to relate her/his academic experience in the master's program to practice. Students are expected to conduct work that builds upon their professional experience to date and enables them to integrate and apply their academic preparation. Application of content and integration in practice are the core elements of the organizational experience.

The student should spend a minimum of 200 hours of work in the organizational experience (approximately 150 contact hours on-site and 50 hours in background research and preparation of the final submissions). Upon completion, the student documents their work for the host organization and the University in a project report; the nature of the documentation varies with the kind of work the student undertakes and the needs and expectation of the host organization.

### **When should the organizational experience occur?**

The organizational experience should be taken as close to the end of your curriculum as possible in order for it to be truly integrative. Students may take the organizational experience any time after they have successfully completed at least 42 graduate credits in their master's program at PSU. This requirement helps to ensure that students have sufficient academic experience to use their organizational experience as an integrative and reflective activity.

For MPA students: you must have completed the "Field of Specialization" form after discussing it with your faculty advisor, no later than upon completion of 42 credits. The advisor must sign the form, and the original should be given to Becky Fidler to place in your student file. A copy of the signed Field of Specialization form **must** be attached to the PA 509 learning contract.

### **Who are the faculty in charge of the organizational experience?**

Each quarter two faculty are listed in the Bulletin as PA 509 faculty, one for MPA students and another for MPA:HA and MPH:HMP students. Following attendance at the PA 509 orientation, students are required to communicate with their assigned faculty advisor to develop their career goals, identify an appropriate site, and meet with the potential field supervisor to begin to define

the organizational experience. After students receive approval of their draft contract from their faculty advisor, they contact the PA 509 faculty, who are responsible for final approval of the student's learning contract, and will register the student once the contract is approved. The PA 509 faculty completes the final assessment to determine the grade. Students may not begin their experience until the contract is approved. A contract may be approved in the midst of a quarter and the experience can begin, although registration will not occur until the next quarter.

### **How is an organizational experience arranged?**

Students must attend the orientation prior to making arrangements for their organizational experience. Orientation is offered two to three times each quarter (except Summer). Students should then work with their assigned faculty advisor to identify an appropriate site for the experience in light of the student's career goals, articulate the nature of the organizational experience, and begin working on the components of the learning contract. Students are encouraged to conduct informational interviews to help select the site for the experience. You may also find information on your program listserv (one for MPA, one for MPH); if you are not subscribed, contact Becky Fidler at [rfidler@pdx.edu](mailto:rfidler@pdx.edu).

Once a site is determined, students then identify and define relevant projects that will allow them to integrate across their program of study and draw upon the knowledge and skills developed through the graduate program. All projects should be of substantive interest to the field site, and make a contribution to the operations of the organization. In order to integrate, students should have the skills required by the project(s) they have identified, either through coursework or other experience. You should not agree to do a project where you do not have the skills – for example, agreeing to conduct an evaluation for your PA 509 if you have not taken either of the classes on Program Evaluation or have developed evaluation expertise through work. Similarly, you should not take on development of a strategic plan if you have not taken the relevant course work. Be sure you have the relevant skills for the work the organization is asking you to conduct and complete, as they will assume you have that knowledge base through your graduate program. The faculty will not approve a project for which you do not have relevant experience.

The student then begins work on the Organizational Experience Learning Contract. The learning contract sets out identifying information about the student and the site, experience requirements, the student's career goals and learning objectives, skill requirements, and final submissions. The contract usually takes several hours of preparation to complete, including review of points 6-10 by the faculty advisor and revisions in order to meet the expected format and content. When the faculty advisor feels the contract is complete, the student then submits points 6-10 by email to the PA 509 faculty for final review. The PA 509 faculty may have additional revisions to ensure that the contract is comprehensive and provides the basis for grading. Once all materials are approved by the PA 509 faculty, the student prepares the complete learning contract in hard copy. The contract cover page is signed by the student, the field supervisor, and the faculty advisor, and submits all materials with the signed special registration form(s) to the PA 509 faculty. The PA 509 faculty will sign the contract cover page, register the student, and maintain the contract on file in their office. This process may take several weeks to complete.

If a student is having difficulty arranging a meeting with their faculty advisor due to travel, scheduling, sabbatical or illness, then the student should contact Becky Fidler ([rfidler@pdx.edu](mailto:rfidler@pdx.edu)) who will help them to identify an alternate faculty advisor.

In some circumstances, students may complete their PA 509 with their current employer. However, experience for the PA 509 must be outside the normal scope of their position. Students must have their written learning contract approved by the faculty advisor and the PA 509 advisor, prior to beginning a 509 placement in their employment setting.

**What should be the emphasis in my career goals?**

Career goals should be written for the short-term (1-2 years beyond graduation) and the longer-term (5 years beyond graduation). In 2-3 pages, describe the kinds of positions you hope to hold, including settings, scope of work, responsibilities, and expectations. Career goals should build upon experience to date, and learning/professional preparation in the master’s program.

**What is, and how do I write, a learning objective?**

Learning objectives describe knowledge, skills and/or competencies that the student will develop or enhance through the PA 509 experience. Students should draft an initial set of learning objectives, and then work with their faculty advisor to revise and finalize appropriate learning objectives. The learning objectives should:

- Describe the performance of a major cognitive skill (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and/or evaluation). Students should pay particular attention to the latter three in developing their objectives.
- Begin with an action verb that matches the means of performance assessment.
- Describe the intended outcome or product, not the process.
- Be measurable.
- Address a single activity in each objective.

The following table lists the major skill areas frequently addressed through PA 509, and illustrates appropriate verbs that might be used in learning objectives related to these skill areas:

Skill Areas	Appropriate Verbs for Learning Objectives
Knowledge	categorize, define, organize, recognize, relate, reproduce, review, study
Comprehension	describe, discuss, explain, identify, indicate, report, select, translate
Application	apply, demonstrate, illustrate, interpret, practice, solve, use, write
Analysis	analyze, calculate, compare, contrast, distinguish, examine, test
Synthesis	assemble, create, develop, manage, organize, plan, prepare, propose
Evaluation	appraise, assess, compare, evaluate, measure, predict, select, synthesize

As you develop the learning objectives, think about the following:

- What competencies will you have achieved when you have completed the PA 509?
- What new or enhanced skills will you have developed?
- What new knowledge will you have gained, and how will you have applied this knowledge in practice?
- What tasks and activities must be accomplished in order to achieve these competencies, knowledge areas, and/or skills?
- How will this achievement of competencies, knowledge and/or skills be measured or observed?
- How will you demonstrate concrete evidence to your field supervisor and the faculty advisor that you have attained the learning objectives?

Students will normally create 4-5 learning objectives for the experience. For each learning objective a set of concrete tasks/deliverables must be articulated, as well as the evidence that will be submitted to demonstrate accomplishment of the learning objective. Some sample learning objectives, associated tasks and related evidence are listed below:

Sample Objective #1: Develop skills in grant writing.

Tasks:

- Identify grant source that is suitable for the program.
- Write a proposal to fund expansion initiatives.
- Develop the budget.
- Submit the grant.

Evidence submitted: Fully-developed grant proposal.

Sample Objective #2: Develop competencies in strategic planning.

Tasks:

- Identify stakeholders and other relevant constituent groups.
- Conduct SWOT analysis.
- Arrange focus groups with stakeholders to discuss results of SWOT analysis.
- Develop draft strategic plan.
- Conduct email review process to get feedback on draft strategic plan.
- Revise plan.
- Develop and make presentation to Board on results of SWOT and draft strategic plan.

Evidence submitted: Comprehensive strategic plan; presentation slides; script for presentation.

Sample Objective #3: Enhance applied skills in policy development.

Tasks:

- Write project proposal with goals, objectives, timeline and products.
- Assess current processes for updating patient insurance information.
- Determine additional data necessary to assess and develop recommendations for benefit coordination.
- Develop tools and identify resources for implementation of final products.
- Prepare a report on these results for the Senior Leadership team. Demonstrate relevant subject/industry knowledge through literature review as part of this report.

Evidence submitted: Written proposal and report, incorporating literature review, tools data analysis, synthesis and recommendations.

Sample Objective #4: Demonstrate evaluation skills in order to analyze evaluation results and make program improvement recommendations.

Tasks:

- Design evaluation, including relevant data collection methods, for target program.
- Administer various evaluation methods, and collect data.
- Conduct data analysis, identifying key themes and preparing both quantitative and qualitative analyses.
- Write report synthesizing key themes of results.
- Develop recommendations for program modifications and improvements.
- Present report to staff and to Board of Directors.

Evidence submitted: Evaluation documentation (e.g. conceptual framework, data collection methods); summaries of data analysis; report; presentation slides and script.

**A final learning objective must address the role of the organizational experience as an opportunity to integrate and apply what has been learned in the curriculum to date, and to consider future career directions.**

Sample Final Learning Objective: Integrate and apply what has been learned in the curriculum during the organizational experience, identify future career directions, and articulate potential ongoing professional development needs.

Tasks:

- Engage in reflection activities throughout the organizational experience.
- Document personal progress toward both career goals and learning objectives
- Prepare the required reflective paper.

Evidence submitted: Reflective paper; presentation slides.

### **What kind of flexibility is there in the timing of the organizational experience?**

Once the experience has been approved and a learning contract has been signed, a student may begin the PA 509. In some cases, this may begin mid-quarter, with a student not registering until the next quarter although time on-site has actually begun. It is also common for a student to register for and begin the experience in one quarter, take an “incomplete” grade, continue the work into a second quarter, complete the work, and receive the grade in the second quarter. There is individual flexibility in coordinating on-site experience with academic registration by quarter, and this should be discussed with the PA 509 faculty, but there is **no** flexibility with regard to the deadlines for registration (i.e. end of the second week of the quarter).

### **How do I register for the organizational experience?**

Registration for PA 509 requires completion of a "Special Registration Form." The on-line registration process cannot be used for PA509. The deadline to be able to register is the end of the second week of the academic quarter upon submission of an approved and signed contract to the PA 509 faculty. Students will not be approved for registration for PA 509 without the authorization and signature of the PA 509 faculty advisor.

Students should obtain the special registration form from Becky Fidler or online, and complete and sign the form. They should then submit the form with their signed learning contract, and the PA 509 faculty advisor will complete the registration process for the student. Please note that the regular faculty advisor may not register the student, nor may the PA staff; registration must be approved by the PA 509 faculty. If you intend to register over two quarters, please provide two copies of the completed and signed special registration form.

### **What are the final submissions?**

There are three required submissions that must be provided in hard copy to the Public Administration office. Students may find it helpful to maintain a journal during the experience to help in the preparation of their submissions. The journal provides the basis for the reflective paper, and may also offer a log of activities that are part of the project report. In general, you will find it best to organize your materials into a binder with dividers and clear logic in organization so that the PA 509 faculty can easily review it. Your learning contract narrative serves as the basis to evaluate your submissions, so be sure that they are congruent.

The **first submission** is the project report that is prepared for the field organization and the University, and documents the work you have completed for the organization. The format and

content of this submission is dependent upon the nature of the work and the needs and expectations of the organization. Students may wish to discuss the format of the final project report with the PA 509 faculty. The final project report is worth 40% of the grade, and should receive substantial attention as the student prepares it. The project report begins with a project overview including a description of the setting, the processes of work of the PA 509 experience, and the outcomes. It includes detailed written documentation developed for the organization (as relevant), and may include recommendations, conclusions, and/or policies. Students should clearly indicate what is their original work, and what is other work that they are submitting as supplemental documentation. The documentation/evidence submitted should clearly link to the approved learning objectives.

In some cases, it will be a logical output of the work – for example, a comprehensive binder documenting the development of a strategic and/or business plan for a major organizational unit. In other cases, where a student is engaged in process activities that are less easy to document, the student will create a journal or other documentation that provides them with the necessary comprehensive overview and summary of work conducted (both tangible and less tangible) and clearly summarizes the various activities in which the student has been engaged during the PA 509. It is not sufficient to simply submit sample documents with no accompanying narrative that describes the overall experience. A brief narrative or product resembling a term paper is not sufficient – something that serves the needs of the field placement may not be sufficient for academic credit so be sure your project report is substantial.

When in doubt, err on providing more information rather than less. Consult with the PA 509 faculty if you have questions prior to submitting your final materials. Where documentation is considered confidential, only the PA 509 faculty will review it. These materials are returned to the student by the PA 509 faculty after grading.

The **second submission** is a reflective paper (minimum 10 pages) that is submitted only to the University. This should be a reflection on the value of the field experience, addressing:

- achievement of the student's learning objectives that were articulated at the beginning of the organizational experience,
- description of related learning,
- opportunities for integration of curricular content in practice,
- needs for future professional development and/or continuing education, and
- implications of the experience for future career directions based on the experience and related learning.

The **third submission** is a slide presentation of the highlights of your experience to other students, faculty, and field supervisors. This is submitted in hard copy with your other materials, and presented as a 10-minute presentation that will be scheduled with other students' presentations at the end of each of Fall, Winter and Spring quarters, as well as in September for those who complete the PA 509 in the summer. Summer graduation may be authorized for those who present in September; discuss this with the PA 509 faculty. In rare cases an exemption from the presentation requirement may be granted because of relocation away from Portland. This must be negotiated with the PA 509 faculty. If an exemption to present is granted, the student must still submit the slides for the presentation.

Students will prepare a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation format should be no more than 12 slides and must include:

- title slide
- goal/emphasis of work
- summary of learning objectives (not tasks or evidence)
- approximately 4 slides describing the process and outcomes of work
- approximately 2 slides illustrating the significance of your work for the organization
- approximately 2 slides outlining the implications of the experience for your future career
- acknowledgements

Be sure that your slides are clear, and are not overly detailed and wordy. If you incorporate graphics, they should be easy to read. Avoid using too much text, and maintain a large font. A hard copy of the slides (6 slides per page) should be included with the other submissions.

### **What if I am having difficulty during my organizational experience?**

The organizational experience is meant to provide you with a “real life” experience. As in real life, sometimes there are problems at the selected site for the organizational experience. Students are encouraged to contact the PA 509 faculty immediately if there is a problem. Working closely with the field supervisor and the faculty, most problems can be resolved if addressed early. In rare instances, it may be necessary to find another, more appropriate placement.

### **What are the deadlines for submission of final materials?**

Deadlines for submission of hard copies of final project reports, reflective papers and slides are 5 p.m. as follows: December 1 for Fall quarter; March 1 for Winter quarter; June 1 for Spring quarter; and September 1 for Summer session. When these dates fall on a holiday or weekend, the next regular workday is the deadline for the term. Materials submitted by these dates will be graded in time for grades to be submitted that quarter; grades for materials received after these deadlines will be submitted in the next academic quarter, prior to the grading deadline for that quarter. Presentations will normally be scheduled 1-2 weeks after submission of the other materials. Grades are submitted after the presentations are concluded. There is **no** flexibility for extension of these deadlines.

### **What are the mechanisms for assessment of my work?**

PA 509 is graded similarly to all other classes. The PA 509 faculty will review your three final submissions to determine the grade. The grade will be determined as follows: Final project report: 40%; Reflective paper: 30%; Presentation: 20%; and Faculty assessment of student’s progress: 10%. The 509 faculty will work with students who hand in deficient work to guide them in completion of a product adequate for a passing grade; however, this may run into the next quarter depending upon date of submission of materials.

### **Who can answer additional questions about the PA 509 requirement?**

The PA 509 orientation should answer many of the questions about the organizational experience. Additional questions about the organizational experience requirement should be directed to your faculty advisor.

# **PA 509 Organizational Experience**

## **Guidelines for the Final Presentation**

All students completing PA 509 will make a presentation of the highlights of their experience to other students, faculty, and field supervisors. This is a 10-minute presentation that will be scheduled with other students' presentations at the end of each quarter (Fall, Winter, Spring) with an additional presentation session in September for those completing in the summer.

Students will prepare a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation format should be no more than 12 slides and must be structured as follows:

- Slide 1: title slide, location of field placement, name of field supervisor
- Slide 2: goal/emphasis of work
- Slide 3: summary of learning objectives (not tasks or evidence)
- Slides 4-7 (approximately): describe the process and outcomes of the work
- Slides 8-9 (approximately): illustrate the significance of the student's work for the host organization
- Slides 10-11 (approximately): outline the implications of the student's experience for their future career
- Slide 12: acknowledgements

In preparing your slides, be attentive to the following for effective presentation:

- Use a large, clear font
- Avoid having too many words per slide – ideally no more than 3 or 4 lines per slide
- Do not make your slides too busy with color, background, graphics; focus on the content over the design/layout
- If you are inserting pictures, be sure they add to the slide's content and are large enough to be seen

Remember to rehearse your presentation to be sure you are familiar with the content and that you can make the presentation within the 10-minute limit, which will be monitored. This is a professional presentation and you should be attentive to your demeanor including dress, grooming, delivery, enunciation, and clarity. The expectation is that graduates will demonstrate competency for entering (or continuing in) the field of public service.

The PowerPoint file should be emailed to Becky Fidler in the Public Administration office (rfidler@pdx.edu) in advance of the presentations. Hard copy of the presentation, printed 6 slides per page, should be included in the submissions you provide to the PA 509 faculty.

In rare cases an exemption from the presentation requirement may be granted because of relocation away from Portland. This must be negotiated with the PA 509 academic advisor. If an exemption to present is granted, the student must still submit the slides for the presentation with their other final materials in hard copy.

**Portland State University  
PA 509 Organizational Experience**

**LEARNING CONTRACT**

**The completed learning contract, including original signatures of the student, field supervisor and faculty of record, is maintained on file at the Division of Public Administration. Students should keep a copy for their own records. Students will be registered for PA 509 after the final contract is completed and approved.**

*\*\* Please type or print neatly. \*\**

**STUDENT INFORMATION:**

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Last name	First Name	M.I.	University ID #
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Street Address	City	State	Zip Code
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Home Phone	Work Phone	Email Address
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Degree Program (circle one):      MPA      MPA:HA      MPH: HMP

If MPA, indicate MPA specialization: \_\_\_\_\_  
(MPA students: Attach a copy of your Field of Specialization form, signed by your faculty advisor; this will not be reviewed without this form attached)

Number of credit hours completed in the program to date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Faculty Academic Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

**FIELD SITE INFORMATION:**

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Organization

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Address	City	State	Zip Code
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Field supervisor name	Title
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Work Phone	Fax	Email address
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***Please turn over the page.***

**Please complete all of the following items:**

1. Date of attending the PA 509 Orientation: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Anticipated term(s) for enrollment in organizational experience: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Anticipated date of completion of all PA 509 requirements and submission of final materials: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Attach a list of courses taken in the master's program and grades for those courses, as well as a schedule of remaining courses to be taken.
5. Attach a complete and current resume.
6. State your specific career goals for the near future, and for 5 years from now (2-3 pages).
7. Describe the organizational setting, department/unit, field supervisor name and position title, nature of work to be completed, and experience/skill requirements. Describe what you are going to do for the organizational experience (2-3 paragraphs).
8. Describe your learning objectives for the experience (1-2 pages). Be explicit, as you will use these as the basis for reflection and measurement of your learning and accomplishments at the end of the experience.
9. Describe all courses taken to date that relate to the proposed organizational experience (8-10 courses). List all relevant course names and numbers, and include a 3-4 sentence discussion for each course of the theoretical learning principles that you expect to apply in the organizational experience. (2-3 pages)
10. Describe the final submissions – the project report you will submit to the organization and to the University, the reflective paper you will complete for the University, and the final presentation (1-3 paragraphs).

**REQUIRED SIGNATURES:**

_____	_____
Student signature	Date
_____	_____
Field supervisor signature	Date
_____	_____
Assigned faculty advisor signature	Date
_____	_____
PA 509 Faculty signature	Date