

## **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.

### **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 Megan Loos 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.

### **What are the steps to arrange an organizational experience?**

*Step 1.* Students must attend the orientation prior to making arrangements for their organizational experience. Orientation is usually offered three times each quarter (except Summer so plan to take an orientation one or two terms PRIOR to enrolling in your 509).

*Step 2.* 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 about potential sites on your program listserv (one for MPA, one for MPH).

*Step 3.* Students meet with the potential field supervisor to 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, or agree to a project that involves volunteer management if you have not taken Volunteer Management or Values-Based Management. 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.

*Step 4.* 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. After students receive approval of their draft contract from the faculty advisor, the student then contacts the PA 509 faculty and submits points 6-10 by email in one document for further review. The PA 509 faculty may have additional revisions to ensure that the contract is comprehensive and provides the basis for grading. The PA 509 faculty is responsible for final approval of the student's contract. 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 the student then 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. Students may not begin their experience until the contract is approved. Work done before the contract is signed may not be counted towards the hours or deliverables to complete the PA 509.

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 Megan Loos (meloos@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, but the experience for the PA 509 must be outside the normal scope of their position.

### **Specific information about Points 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11 of the Learning Contract**

*What should be the emphasis in my career goals (point 6)?* 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 (double-spaced), 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 in the master's program.

*How do I write learning objectives (point 8)?* 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, with particular emphasis on application, analysis, synthesis, and/or evaluation).
- 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.

Action verbs you might use in learning objectives include:

- |               |              |            |
|---------------|--------------|------------|
| • Demonstrate | • Expand     | • Practice |
| • Apply       | • Enhance    | • Improve  |
| • Develop     | • Utilize    | • Advance  |
| • Increase    | • Build upon |            |

*For the learning objectives themselves, describe:*

- What competencies will you have achieved when you have completed the PA 509?
- What new or enhanced skills will you develop?
- What new knowledge will you gain, and how will you apply this knowledge in practice?

*For your tasks, identify:*

- What tasks and activities must be accomplished in order to achieve these competencies, knowledge areas, and/or skills?

*For the evidence you will provide as the basis for evaluation and grading, articulate:*

- How will this achievement of competencies, knowledge and/or skills be demonstrated?
- 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, as well as a final integrative objective. If you are only able to develop two or three learning objectives, it is quite likely that the project is not substantive enough to qualify as a solid organizational experience. Please talk with your faculty advisor for more direction. For each objective a set of concrete tasks/deliverables must be articulated, as well as the evidence that will be submitted to demonstrate accomplishment of the 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 grant proposal to fund expansion initiatives.
- Develop the budget and related materials.
- Finalize and 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.
- Draft focus group protocol, conduct focus groups, and analyze results.
- Develop draft strategic plan.
- Conduct email review process to get feedback on draft strategic plan, and make revisions.
- 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 client information.
- Determine additional data necessary to assess and develop recommendations.
- 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 conceptual framework and relevant data collection methods, for target program.
- Administer various evaluation methods, collect data, and conduct data analysis
- Identify 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 should I consider in writing the course integration section (point 9)?*

A project must have sufficient substance to allow you to draw upon and integrate **8-10 courses** that you have **completed** in your current program. It is sometimes useful to start with your course list and identify what you will apply and can integrate into your project, rather than try to fit courses into your objectives.

For each course, list the course name and course number. Identify specific, relevant **theoretical learning principles** (from the syllabus or your course materials). Then discuss how you will apply these in your project work

*What do I include in the final submissions section of the learning contract (point 10)?*

For this section of your learning contract you need to include the following:

- A description of the project report you will be submitting to the organization and the University. This should cross-reference to the evidence you have identified in your learning objectives. Note that the report for the organization may not be as detailed as that required for the University, but you need to articulate both. More discussion of the final products is presented later in this document.
- A statement about the submission and general content of the reflective paper.
- A statement about the submission of the hard copy of slides used for the presentation.

*What do I say about the competencies (point 11)?*

Refer to the list of 10 divisional competencies on the PA website (MPH:HMP and MPA:HA students use the health-specific versions) and identify which of the competencies will be developed through your organizational experience, describing steps to competency attainment.

**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, and continue and complete the work in a subsequent 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 online or from the PA office, and complete and sign the form. They 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 complete and sign two copies of the special registration form.

The Division of Public Administration **must** have your final learning contract in hard copy with original signatures (this does not mean fax or email). If necessary, send it via mail or courier and be sure to allow adequate time for delivery prior to registration deadlines.

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

There are four 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. There should be a table of contents, and all appendices should be clearly identified.

The narrative should describe the work completed for the PA 509 project. It may be organized by the learning objectives, or it may be a single integrated project report that describes the process of work and the products. 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; what the field site desires or needs may not be sufficient for academic credit so be sure your project report is substantial.

Material that is relevant to your work should be included in the narrative; documentation that supports your work should be included in an appendix. Your narrative should explicitly make

connections to each appendix to demonstrate the connections of the materials to the work being described. The documentation/evidence submitted should clearly link to the approved learning objectives. This may include materials not submitted to the field organization but needed to satisfy the learning objectives. If you identified “evidence” in your contract that is not included in the product submitted to the field site, you must include it in this section.

Do not include materials that are not directly relevant to your project or the product. Only include materials that you have been involved in developing; if these are the result of group work, please clearly indicate your involvement in the development and document your contributions (and explain why the materials are included in your project report). The inclusion of extraneous materials will not help your grade.

Consult with the PA 509 faculty if you have questions prior to submitting your final materials. Only the PA 509 faculty review your materials. These materials are returned to the student by the PA 509 faculty after grading. Where documents are considered confidential, students should make arrangements with the PA 509 faculty in advance, so that they can expedite the return of the materials to the student.

The **second submission** is a reflective paper (minimum 11 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,
- accomplishment of some or all of the 10 Divisional competencies,
- 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.

Students must cover these points thoroughly and completely.

The **third submission** is a 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 in December, March, June and September. Summer graduation is feasible for those who present in September; discuss this with the PA 509 faculty. Students who are unable to present at the scheduled session may either present at an alternative time, or via Skype (if relocated out of Portland). This must be negotiated with the PA 509 faculty. Regardless of the presentation timing and venue, the student must still submit the slides for presentation with the remainder of their PA 509 materials. The presentation grade is based on both the quality of the content presented as well as the professional nature of the presentation.

Students will prepare a presentation (using PowerPoint) of no more than 12 slides and must include:

- title slide
- goal/emphasis of work
- summary of learning objectives (not tasks or evidence)
- approximately 3 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
- one slide describing accomplishment of some or all of the Divisional competencies
- 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. This is not a presentation of your project per se but a presentation about the 509 experience. Finally, as this is a professional presentation, students should be attentive to appropriate professional dress, language and style of presentation, all of which will contribute to the final grade.

The **fourth submission** is a student self-assessment of competency attainment. This should be completed and included with the other submissions. The competency self-assessment is not graded but is a required submission.

**Remember** to carefully proofread all submissions to address any typographical or grammatical errors, and to practice your presentation for delivery and timing.

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

Deadlines for submission of hard copies of all final materials are: December 1 for Fall quarter completion; March 1 for Winter; June 1 for Spring; and September 1 for Summer. When these dates fall on a holiday or weekend, the next regular workday is the deadline for the term. Presentations will normally be scheduled 1-2 weeks after these dates. Materials submitted by these dates will be graded that quarter; grades for materials received after these deadlines will be submitted in the next academic quarter. There is **no** flexibility for extension of these deadlines.

#### **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 mechanisms for assessment of my work?**

The PA 509 faculty is responsible for reviewing all submissions and determining the grade. They will review your submissions to determine the grade 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; this may extend to the next quarter.

#### **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.



**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 (print clearly):**

<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
Last name	First Name	M.I.	University ID #
<hr/>			
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
Street Address	City	State	Zip Code
<hr/>			
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	
Personal Phone	Work Phone	Email Address	
<hr/>			
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 (print clearly):**

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Organization			
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<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
Address	City	State	Zip Code
<hr/>			
<hr/>	<hr/>		
Field supervisor name	Title		
<hr/>			
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Work Phone	Fax	Email address	

***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 submission of final PA 509 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. MPA students also attach a copy of your signed field of specialization form.
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 double-spaced)
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 double-spaced)
8. Describe your learning objectives for the experience. For each objective, include a list of tasks and the evidence you will submit.
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 **both** the theoretical learning principles and how you expect to apply them in the organizational experience. (2-3 pages double-spaced)
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 double-spaced)
11. Describe how the proposed work will help you achieve some or all of the ten Divisional competencies. Write briefly about each competency that is relevant to your work, using the numbers and competencies on the PA website. (3-4 paragraphs double-spaced)

**REQUIRED SIGNATURES:**

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