Capstone Paper

Jiuqi(Josie) Wang

Department of Public Administration & Policy

School of Public & International Affairs

University of Georgia

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<u>Introduction</u>

In the final semester of the MPA program, students are required to write a capstone paper that reflects upon their mastery of MPA program competencies. This capstone paper describes how the MPA program has prepared me to achieve my career goals, and identifies the most important public service values that guide me in public service. Furthermore, the paper provides specific examples of how MPA courses helped me develop some MPA competencies in my internship experiences. Finally, I explain how content from the MPA courses fostered my development of the five core competencies.

<u>Professional Goals and Public Service Values</u>

Statement of Professional Goals in Public Service

After I graduate from the MPA program, my career is most likely to develop in the direction of two short-term goals. My first goal is to become an assistant consultant at market research and consulting firms like Ipsos, Gallup, and Nielsen. At these firms, I could inform changes in public policy and strengthen government programs by generating analytic insights into public services and the perceptions and experiences of citizens and consumers in public sectors. Government agencies must balance ever-increasing and ever-competing demands (e.g., population shifts, changing demographics, politics, public health, the environment, budgets, citizen preferences, and the tension of policy trade-offs on multiple industry issues) to best serve citizens and collaborate with private sectors. To manage this balance of demands and make informed decisions, government agencies must import and collate the continuous flow of data and information from relevant industries. My fields of interest are artificial intelligence (AI) in public service, public health, renewable energy, arts and culture, and gender equity.

My second short-term goal is to become a research assistant at an AI innovation center or research institute at a Chinese university. By managing projects, engaging in project research and releasing final results, such a role will coordinate resources and liaise among all industries, universities, governments, and research institutes. This position will also take charge of publicizing AI technology and products that transform scientific achievement and of winning the support of government policies and funds and upstream and downstream industrial enterprises. Furthermore, you have to master the daily management of graduate students.

Ultimately, I have two long-term goals. The first one is to build a nongovernmental think tank that focuses on emerging public health issues in China and pursues intensive cooperation with the U.S. in AI application within public health. The second one is to build YouTube and Bilibili (China's YouTube) channels and a WeChat public account as an independent journalist. These media accounts will help Chinese citizens understand public policies and provide them a platform to raise issues of livelihood in different areas like public health, renewable energy, poverty alleviation, and gender equity. In addition, my reports of these public voices will attract the attention of majority groups and promote policy solutions at every level of government.

Before studying at SIPA, I hadn't formed explicit short-term goals because my undergraduate major was not related to public service. However, the MPA program has brought me into contact with many issues in public administration and helped me determine which key fields I like most. Take examples as follow.

Based on my interest in applying AI in public service, Dr. Anastasopoulos introduced me to AI and machine learning concepts like facial recognition, intelligent assistance, automatic drive, clinical decision software program, computer vision, and translation

software. My interest in the clinical application of AI arose at a leader discussion with Shelby Steuart. She defined three clinical modes: the clinical method, the statistical method, and both in combination. She talked about when we see each mode as preferred and in which scenarios they should be used together. As the Internet and electronic medical records have progressed, researchers and private industries have found ways to integrate statistical/actuarial models into the clinical setting. Some clinical decision software uses medical algorithms combined with the patient's chart and physician's input to aid physicians in selecting the most appropriate diagnoses. The software can also recommend medications and flag potential contraindications.

Within gender equity, I assessed the literature and primary arguments surrounding a key issue to finish the issue paper "Should the Federal Government Add Sexual Orientation to Civil Rights Laws?" In addition, I focused on the theme of gender budgets in Public Budgeting, analyzed the development of Australian gender budget reform, and finished the conceptual framework paper "Modeling How Gender Budgeting Achieves Gender Equality Goals." In short, the MPA program has introduced me to new areas in public service and guided my interest in future career pathways.

To achieve my long-term goal of becoming an independent journalist, I need to practice uncovering interesting and significant policy issues; finding appropriate organizations and interviewees to reflect, explain, and explore these issues; communicating with key persons; setting insightful questions; editing and compiling first-hand information; and writing news reports. The MPA coursework has provided many chances to improve my abilities in these areas. In Public Administration and Democracy, I interviewed Anna Ceravolo, director of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren with the Athens Community Council on Aging (ACCA). When my group members and I conducted in-depth fiscal analysis of the Missouri Department of Economic Development, we interviewed Stacey

Hirst, their director of financial systems. For our government consulting project in Local Government Practicum, my classmate Sara and I contacted 20 visual and performing arts-related practitioners and interviewed 10 of them. Throughout these experiences, I became familiar with the interview workflow and developed better methods for writing questions and sequencing distinct answers into episodes or a complete story.

Public Service Values

I was dedicated to two kinds of most important public services values. First, equity is an essential value for people who plan to work in the public sector. Public management provides fair and equitable services to constituencies, while private management places greater emphasis on efficiency and competitive performance in niche markets. These two orientations are largely incompatible with one another. For example, if a local government plans to build a public bus route, public servants must consider including towns so that these people have access to public transportation. However, building a village bus stop is not a good choice for a private company because this strategy is inefficient and unprofitable. Because we cannot ignore minority groups in our society, we should likewise consider the oral health of low-income Americans, especially pregnant women who have difficulty accessing dental care in Georgia. To this end, I wrote the research paper "Improving Pregnant Women's Access to Oral Health Care in Georgia" for Policy Analysis, the policy brief "COVID-19 Pandemic Attacks Low-Income Americans' Oral Health" for Policy Process.

The second important value is professional competency and service to the public good. The MPA program emphasizes professional skills and intellectual capacities to make sure students can serve the government and nonprofits. For example, the Data Application class taught me how to use RStudio to import, wrangle, and tidy data. Also, I learned how to visualize the datasets and build multiple regression models. In the Public Financial

Administration class, I mastered how to manage a personnel budget and how to use cost accounting systems when determining variable costs, step costs and semi-variable costs.

<u>Career or Internship Reflection</u>

During the two years in the MPA program, I engaged in an internship at the Chinese Seal Carving Association. In addition, I am a student guest of a new prepared podcast, "Young", by China Media Group. A series of AI in public health is my main speaking theme. Before studying in the MPA program, I worked for the U.S.-China Energy Cooperation Program (ECP) of AmCham China. These internships helped me contribute valuable ideas in class discussions and provided me the experiential basis for linking my coursework to my career goals.

Big Data for Public Administration (BDPA) class has piqued my interest in AI in public health. In this class, I have learned that hospitals view big data as one of the least important tools, in sharp contrast to the views of other industries. Big data in healthcare has enormous potential to improve patient care and ultimately achieve reasonable costs. Governments are cutting healthcare spending, focusing on how to cut costs without compromising the quality of care. This change is forcing healthcare organizations to pilot inexpensive technology-based solutions. Especially in the era of COVID-19, it is imperative for medical services to use big-data machine learning. Further to my interest in AI in public health, I joined "Young", an upcoming podcast by the China Media Group, to speak on the topic. I referenced BDPA course content and class discussions to enrich my podcast channel so that Chinese listeners could follow these innovations in their daily lives. In the last two episodes, I will compare the U.S. and China's AI achievements in public healthcare.

With the Chinese Seal Carving Association (CSCA), I took charge of their public WeChat account, Digital Seal Carving, part of the association's cultural and artistic heritage

and branding based on the concepts of the Internet and the Internet of things. CSCA is committed to inheriting and innovating Chinese seal culture and seal engraving art, popularizing public seal engraving for digital platforms, and cultivating public seal engraving enthusiasts. On the public account, I was responsible for producing and publishing posters, memos, summary reports, and volunteer thank-you cards. I also spoke with the CEO Ling and jury on the theme of each online exhibition and participated in "The Art of Seal Carving Exhibition for Celebrating the 70th Anniversary of China" VR design[1]. Before deciding on themes of exhibitions, I searched for and collected the newest, most popular hashtags and hot topics and then chose three of the easiest to articulate in images and calligraphy. After that, I would speak with the CEO and the jury to achieve a consensus. After the CEO and I chose a theme, association members had one week to brainstorm their subtopic and how to design it. During this phase, I fielded questions and gave feedback. As a CSCA assistant leader, I improved my leadership and communication skills in group projects and presentations in each class of the MPA program to mediate diverse viewpoints and conflicting design drafts.

I participated in writing the *2019 American Business in China White Paper- "Gas, Power and Energy" chapter* in 2018[2]. After I learned about how to write a policy memo in the MPA program, I found that its analytical logic and format are similar to the white paper counterparts. First, analysts should keep the purpose and audience of the memo/white paper in mind at all times. The author of the memo/white paper is not to transfer all your knowledge in one document, but rather to do the research and the analysis and then to provide the main takeaways. We need to recognize that our audience is usually a non-expert, so we should keep the memo/white paper concise and focused. Second, a policy memo and a white paper related to a specific area like "Oil, Gas, Energy, and Power" have nearly the same sections.

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[1] VR exhibition link: https://720yun.com/t/75vkiefyO1l?scene_id=33483125#scene_id=33483129
[2] 2019 American Business in China White Paper link: https://www.amchamchina.org/white_paper/2019-american-business-in-china-white-paper/

For example, "executive summary" has a same function as "introduction" in the white paper; The content of "issue" section can also be set under the "ongoing regulatory issues" part in the white paper; we need to describe the current situation and assess pros and cons in "policy alternatives" section. Similarly, the white paper lists "recent developments" in 2018. Both the policy memo and the white paper should give the audience at least three recommendations.

Program Competency Reflection

Competency 1: To Lead and Manage in Public Governance

This competency will help students identify leadership and management demands across different public or nonprofit sectors. Moreover, students should be able to understand the importance and dynamics of working in groups or teams to make collaborative decisions, incorporate diverse viewpoints, and create a cohesive and professional product. The Climate and Environmental class and Local Government Practicum have contributed to shaping my Competency 1.

I watched a YouTube video called "An Overview of Collaborating for Our Future" by Jill Purdy[3] in Climate and Environmental class. She talked about her book *Collaborating For Our Future: multistakeholder partnerships for solving complex problems*. She and her co-worker identified some challenges that they have been observing for many years around climate change, income inequality, and health inequality issues. All these issues are world problems and are challenging. She recognized that no single sector can address all of these problems and where progress was being made on these big problems is when there are intersections between these sectors of society. Therefore, they analyzed lots of cases related to multisector partnerships and looked at challenges. It is vital to identify who has the power

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[3] YouTube video link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccE1YKyvKFY&ab_channel=UWTacomaExtended

to convene, who has a voice, who doesn't have a voice, and how can you make a difference through this partnership when you are not backed by the people with money, resources, and power. Also, different types of collaborative partners may bring distinct resources to the table: governmental partners have some political and administrative capacity to solve complex problems and nonprofit organizations provide education and the perspective of disadvantaged community groups. Different resources may manifest to varying stages of policymaking. For example, institutions of higher learning can help plan local action, while city-to-city collaboration can help in later stages, such as the implementation process (Brink & Wamsler, 2018).

Local Government Practicum gave me a service-learning opportunity with a local government partner. In 2020 summer, Dr. Zeemering and 15 students (including myself) engaged in community research, "Art and Culture in Athens-Clarke: An Exploration of Stakeholder Perceptions and Community Indicators[4]," to investigate a question posed by the Geographic Information Office of the Athens-Clarke Unified Government. To finish this cohesive and professional report with a large group, we had to incorporate diverse subgroups and different viewpoints from each student. First, the professor split the whole class into seven subgroups, including public events and festivals, creative services and maker business, historic preservation, food, performing and visual arts, and music and open space. Second, Dr. Zeemering collected the preference field and time arrangement of each student by email so that he could allocate students among these subgroups in which members have the same interest and could respond in a timely manner with each other. Third, in order to inspire and develop students' interview questions and collect recommendation ideas, we created shared documents of a questions list and recommendations list. The subgroup could develop their

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[4] MPA portfolio link: https://ctlsites.uga.edu/jiuqiwangmpa/art-and-culture-in-athens-clarke-an-exploration-of-stakeholder-perceptions-and-community-indicators/

specific questions based on this general question list which was edited and improved by the whole class. Also, it was clearer to separate tasks among the students who wanted to make contributions to the recommendation part.

Competency 2: To Participate in the Public Policy Process

This competency will help students understand how a public policy is formulated, implemented and evaluated at the federal, state, and local levels. And students should have the ability to interpret and communicate information through policy memos and presentations. In addition, students have the ability of analyzing policy alternatives using quantitative and qualitative tools to evaluate each alternative. Students will also learn to manage financial resources and develop a comprehensive budget to meet organizational goals. The coursework and knowledge of two classes demonstrate my competency 2: Policy Process and Public Financial Administration.

The Policy Process class built an essential base of the question: what's the policy process? Birkland (2019) divided the policy process into six stages: (1) agenda setting, (2) policy formulation, (3) legitimation, (4) implementation, (5) evaluation, and (6) policy maintenance, modification and termination. Moreover, the budget should be regarded as one of the government's most important policy documents so the budget cycle is one manifestation of the policy process. In the Public Financial Administration class, I learned about the four phases of the budget process: budget preparation, budget approval, budget execution, and budget audit and evaluation. It is worth noting that sometimes the city budget process differs from the federal government budget process. The city budget starts in July-August to avoid not overlapping with the federal government budget which starts in October. The reason why they have different starting days for their fiscal year is that city governments

get aid funds from the federal government, and it is easier for transfers to be received in summer. In particular, some state governments have biennial budget cycles.

Unemployment rates in Georgia are rapidly increasing because of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recession. Employees will lose dental insurance sponsored by their employers if they lose jobs. Then, these individuals are likely to enroll in state-based Medicaid programs. However, Georgia Medicaid dental coverage for adults is only limited to emergencies. In the policy process class, I wrote a policy brief, "COVID-19 Pandemic Attack Low-Income American's Oral Health[5]," to argue that the Georgia State government should take their responsibilities to increase the number of providers and dentists serving Medicaid enrollees, and expand dental benefits for Medicaid enrollees. I provided two policy alternatives: (1) increasing the number of providers and dentists serving Medicaid enrollees, and (2) expanding dental benefits for Medicaid enrollees. The second is a policy strategy in place today but is limited in addressing the overall policy issue at hand. Additionally, I recommended the first policy alternative be incorporated. At the same time, I listed three steps to be carried out.

In the Public Financial Administration class, I constructed a simple, professional, and flexible public "Budget of the Contemporary Art Museum in Thomasville[6]". This assignment allowed me to improve upon my budget construction skills both in concept and in Microsoft Excel. I also demonstrated my findings and recommendations in a memorandum. This budget memo can illustrate my competency in implementing the quantitative and qualitative methods in creating a budget and making recommendations. I created a baseline 2021 monthly budget for the museum. The budget reported the total revenues, total expenditures, and total

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[5] MPA portfolio link: https://ctlsites.uga.edu/jiuqiwangmpa/67-2/
[6] MPA portfolio link: https://ctlsites.uga.edu/jiuqiwangmpa/budget-of-contemporary-art-museum-in-thomasville/

surplus/deficit for each month and for the total year. I also created a parameter sheet for changing any data to the result in the baseline budget. I found that if we increase the adult admission fee from $10 to $15, the total surplus is $194,430.83 and the balance index shows 3.41%, which is less than 5% (the criteria rate). I chose to increase the adult admission fee because we cannot charge students a lot. The government should support schools that carry out educational field trips, so increasing children's prices is not a good way to increase support. Although we will lose some visitors when the price is increasing for the adult who often goes to the museum when the price is $10, they are more likely to continue visiting the museum as usual when the price just increases $5.

Competency 3: To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions

This competency refers to utilizing various methods and analytical tools to analyze and interpret data and the ability to produce research papers. Students should have essential skills of informing stakeholders of decisions and recommendations through the presentation of data and research findings. I cultivated these analytical abilities when I took the Data Applications in Public Administration and Seminar in Public Budgeting courses.

In the Data Applications in Public Administration class, I learned fundamental statistical concepts, data description, and visualization. Also, I mastered how to do predictive and explanatory statistical analysis using RStudio. The assignment Problem Set 2 informed my ability to import, wrangle, tidy and visualize data. Questions 1-4 helped me practice understanding data (i.e., data structure, variable types, etc.), measurement validity and reliability, and visualizing data. Questions 5-6 allowed me practice data wrangling, working with missing values, and reporting simple summary measures. Question 7 helped me practice

a hypothetical analysis project, from import, to wrangling and tidying, to reporting via visualization.

In the Seminar in Public Budgeting course, Dr. Willoughby taught me how to construct a conceptual framework in a research. Her book *Public Performance Budgeting: Principles and Practice* created a good example of a conceptual framework. This framework summarized the basic research outline in performance budgeting practice. Inspiring by this example, I modeled a conceptual framework in my paper, "Modeling How the Gender Budgeting Achieves Gender Equality Goals[7]", to explain how the gender budgeting implementation supports the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries' gender equality goals and tests the relationships between the comprehensive extent to legal foundations of gender budgeting and the same gender equality goals within the OECD countries. The paper further examines whether a stronger legal basis mitigates the gender gap in wages and the proportion of seats in Parliaments. The framework showed five kinds of independent variables that informed the legal basis for gender budgeting in 2018. Based on the independent variables in the framework, I created a table that calculated and ranked the extent of gender budgeting application to achieve gender equality goals. All items under the "Components of the Legal Bases" are required to answer yes or no (yes=1, no=0), except for the components marked with "the number". The number in the cell is the sum of relevant components of gender budgeting laws. The study will score the comprehensiveness of legal basis by dividing the "Sum" into three levels (strong, midlevel, weak).

Competency 4: To article and apply a public service perspective

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[7] MPA portfolio link: https://ctlsites.uga.edu/jiuqiwangmpa/modeling-how-the-gender-budgeting-achieves-gender-equality-goals/

In terms of this competency, students should understand and appreciate the history of American public administration and major issues or controversies in public service over time. Students will learn to apply the profession's code of ethics to ensure accountable and transparent practices at work. Students are also expected to demonstrate an appreciation of the legal, political, and fiscal environment of public management.

In Public Management class, Dr. Brewer required us to read Hal G. Rainey's Understanding and Managing Public Organizations. Rainey devoted a chapter to examining distinctions between public and private organizations, and by extension, between public and private sector management. For example, by being self-sustainable and profitable, public sector entities provide basic public services to the public at costs reasonable in their respective industries. However, unqualified profitability is not the primary motive of private companies; their primary purpose is to make profits efficiently. Therefore, public sectors consider social equity more often than private sectors. Understanding those differences is a prerequisite for the effective management of public organizations and the successful execution of public policy. However, many people deny the existence of public sector uniqueness, including some who assume that public organizations and public management are inferior to the private sector and NGOs. This issue is more than a hobby for public administration scholars and more than shoptalk for public managers.

Considering this distrust in public management, I led a case study presenation, "How Best to Contribute Public Good: Government or Non-Profits?[8]," in the Public Administration and Democracy class. Americans want to make a difference, but by a margin of more than two to one, they believe that the best way to do so is through NGOs, not through government. A lack of trust in the government leads to unwillingness to work in govt, which implies the

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[8] MPA portfolio link: https://ctlsites.uga.edu/jiuqiwangmpa/how-best-to-contribute-public-good-government-or-nonprofit/

risk of future deficits in government human capital. The trend is "trust in government is falling". So how can we reverse this trend? Therefore, my group came up with two possible solutions to reverse the trend. The first one is "the government should make their data readily available". We want to increase transparency and information accessibility, like e-government. If citizens see that their needs are being met, that shows individuals who are interested in government that the government can have a direct effect on people's lives. The second solution is to enhance the cooperation between the governments of any levels and the non-profit organizations. NGOs could help reengineer government to change bureaucratic culture, focusing on results and outputs - building on 'customer-centered' orientation. Nonprofit organizations could assist government to formulate public policy and solve public problems. Government has an important role to play in protecting the public stake in the nonprofit sector.

In Public Personnel Administration class, I learned the definitions of civil service and the merit system. Civil service is the duty of public administrators to carry out the policies of the governing body. The merit system is the practice of hiring and promoting individuals based on their qualifications and job performance (Nigro & Kellough, 2014). Additionally, I studied the evolution of the United States merit system, which can be divided into six phases: (1) government by gentleman (1789–1829), (2) government by the common man (1829–1883), (3) government by the good (1883–1906), (4) government by the efficient (1906–1937), (5) government by managers (1937–1978), (6) government by political managers (1978–now). Informed by the complex public-labor legal environment in the U.S., I wrote an issue paper, "Should the Federal Government Add Sexual Orientation to Civil Rights Laws?[9]," to discuss two arguments. First, the federal government should add sexual

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[9] MPA portfolio link: https://ctlsites.uga.edu/jiuqiwangmpa/should-the-federal-government-add-sexual-orientation-to-civil-rights-laws/

orientation to civil rights laws because sexual orientation discrimination causes economic and psychological harm to LGBT employees. Second, such civil rights laws would grant gay men and lesbians special legal privileges because they seem to be a wealthy group even without civil rights protections.

Competency 5: Communicating with a Diverse Workforce and Citizenry

This competency asks students to exhibit knowledge of principles and practices associated with effective public personnel management; furthermore, they must recognize, consider, and respect different viewpoints in public management and policy decisions and appreciate diversity in the workforce. Students will also apply specific strategies to enhance and ensure equity within the public workforce. Two courses I took were instrumental in conveying this competency: Public Personnel Administration and Public Financial Administration.

Public Personnel Administration class gave me a basic understanding of performance appraisal in public sectors. Performance appraisal is an evaluation that clearly states performance dimensions and criteria used in the evaluation process. Supervisors assign scores based on the judged level of an employee's job performance and share those scores with the evaluees. We often use three performance criteria in performance appraisal. The first criterion is the critical work output the worker is responsible for producing. The second criterion encompasses the traits or personal characteristics presumed to be associated with effective performance, such as dependability, cooperativeness, honesty, diligence, and initiative. The third criterion is the assessment of employee behaviors associated with job performance, such as timeliness in completing tasks and polite conversation with colleagues. In summary, the performance appraisal system provides employees with feedback about their performance,

motivates employees to improve their performance, and helps the public organization decide about pay increases and promotions.

In my issue paper "Should the Federal Government Add Sexual Orientation to Civil Rights Laws?", I found that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people have experienced a long and pervasive history of employment discrimination, but no federal law explicitly prohibits sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination. It would be strategic for the federal government to add sexual orientation to civil rights laws because this strategy could promote a generally positive environment for all workers. However, I also considered the side effects of this strategy. First, workplace hostility may be higher in federal governments with nondiscrimination laws. Second, sexual orientation disclosure may not lead to positive outcomes. Therefore, sexuality in the workplace remains an important and understudied issue with unpredictable consequences.

As our project "Fiscal Analysis of the Missouri Department of Economic Development[10]" progressed, my group exhibited good teamwork in the Public Financial Administration class. When preparing the fiscal analysis through Microsoft Excel, three of us had different opinions about the calculation method to create Figure 2. In consequence, we decided to try every method that everyone proposed. During the process, we excluded unreasonable ways to make connections among the raw data from the annual budgets of the Department of Economic Development (DED). In addition, we found that the DED underwent a department-wide reorganization. This action caused a single-year drop in total appropriations, although expenditures remained relatively consistent. To verify this finding and inquire about reasons for this drop, we interviewed Stacey Hirst. In our communication, she said the DED has had nearly an entire year to adjust to the COVID-19 pandemic, and

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[10] MPA portfolio link: https://ctlsites.uga.edu/jiuqiwangmpa/missouri-department-ofeconomic-development/

appropriations have risen back to their previously high levels. The Business and Community Solutions Division (BCSD) saw similar trends but now receives appropriations that are higher than ever, fulfilling a greater proportion of the DED's primary goals following the reorganization. We concluded that both departments are striving to adapt to the ongoing COVID-19 public health and economic crises.

Conclusion

In the first section, I introduce my two short-term goals and two long-term goals. And I explain how the MPA program inspired my interests in AI application and gender equity. Besides, I demonstrate how the MPA courses manifested two important public service values. In the second section, I talk about the internship experiences that helped me develop the MPA competencies. Finally, I summarize the course knowledge I attained and the portfolio items I finished under each competency.

In the end, I appreciate all the courses that I took in the MPA program and all the professors who transferred abundant knowledge and skills to me. I believe that I am ready to achieve my professional goals in the future and commit myself to serve communities and citizens.

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