



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Government and International Affairs

Master of Public and International Affairs (MPIA) – Capstone Options

Students in the MPIA degree can register for a **GIA 5964: Field Work/Practicum** or **GIA 5904: Project and Report (i.e. the Major Paper)** as their final capstone course,. Both are 3 credit hour courses, and require equivalent time and effort on the part of MPIA students. Both will be evaluated through a committee defense of the knowledge work products. The student's committee is composed of 3 GIA faculty members (one of which is the student's adviser).

What is the procedure for writing a Major Paper or Practicum?

Usually, students should first develop their Major Paper or Practicum topic proposal within GIA 5115: Research Methods or GIA 5464: Qualitative Methods in Global Studies. After this they should meet with their advisor the semester before they anticipate working on their major paper. In the last week of the semester prior to the one where they wish to sign up for GIA 5904 or GIA 5964, they are required to meet with their advisor to obtain permission to sign up. A formal discussion and committee agreement on the outlines of the major paper are required to proceed. At this meeting the student and advisor will layout a timetable for the writing of the major paper. These are the rules:

- ◆ Students can meet with their advisor a number of times to refine their topic depending on faculty availability. At these meetings, the initial written work presented will be paper outlines, argument statements and/or literature reviews.
- ◆ The student will be given a completed first draft deadline for the paper. These dates are normally the end of October and the end of March. This date is typically 5-6 calendar weeks from the final exam date of that semester. Sometimes students may have to change topics because their initial written work or starting drafts were not adequate. Preparing thoroughly

the prior semester is the best way to avoid lost time during the actual semester you are registered for GIA 5904 or GIA 5964. If structural changes are required, it is possible that the advisor may review another draft once the student works diligently on the feedback received (this will vary from case to case and will follow the agreement between the student and advisor).

- ◆ This first complete draft is sent to the student's advisor alone. He or she will then read the first draft within a few days of receipt and return it with comments and suggestions for revisions. The name of the file should be [students last name] + 'firstdraft' + [date] (e.g. BushFirstDraft21Nov2018.doc).
- ◆ There are three potential outcomes, indicated by color signals, after the first complete draft is read by the student's advisor:
 - **Progress Subject to Minor Revisions (Green Light)**: If the paper, in the judgment of the student's faculty advisor, is sufficiently strong subject to minor revisions, the faculty advisor will then authorize the student to go to the VT Graduate website and Request a Final Exam through the Electronic Signature System (ESS). The faculty adviser will advise the student of the particular date and time to request based on that semester's set aside capstone defense dates and in consultation with evolving faculty schedules. It is the adviser not the student's responsibility to provide the day/time but the student's responsibility to electronically request it from the Graduate School.

The Graduate School requires two week's advance notice of all Major Paper and Practicum defense times, dates and locations. The ESS Request for Final Exam system will automatically send an email to the student's committee who then have to authorize the day and time of the defense. Failure on a student's part to follow faculty adviser instructions may result in delays.

Faculty members will typically request to review the second draft of the Major Paper or Practicum before distribution to the student's committee for the defense. A deadline for this second draft is set by the adviser, and assuming the revision is satisfactory, this draft is circulated to the student's committee.
 - **Progress Suspended (Yellow Light)**: If the paper is structurally weak and has major problems the advisor may give the student an opportunity to respond within two weeks to the identified problems with a warning that they may not be allowed to proceed. A second draft is required at an agreed date, and a final decision is rendered, turning the yellow into a definitive green or red.
 - **Progress Denied (Red Light)**: If the paper is weak, the student will be asked to radically revise the paper, elaborate on sections that were not satisfactorily developed, or change topics. No defense will be scheduled until the paper is of a sufficient standard to be presented for defense. In effect, this means that the student will not be able to graduate that semester because they have not completed their final major paper requirement. Their GIA 5904 grade will be an incomplete. Their next available opportunity will be determined in consultation with their advisor. Typically, this will involve signing up the next available semester for Start of Semester Defense Exception.

This allows the student a three-week window at the beginning of a regular semester or most of the summer to successfully defend and complete their major paper. Check with Graduate School website for the precise dates of the window as they vary from semester to semester. Note that completion during the summer is complicated by faculty unavailability and may not be possible.

More often, the student may have to enroll in a one credit course to guarantee her “Defending Student Status”, which allows for a defense to be scheduled in the following semester. This is the case if a green light is given to the student after the adviser reads her new “first draft”. According to the rules of the Graduate School: “Students approved for defending student status (...) will be charged for 1 hour of graduate tuition plus a technology fee, academic fee, and capital fee (if applicable)”.

The required form must be submitted to the Graduate School at least three weeks prior to the exam day, but no later than the Friday of the third week of classes. The student must also submit the Application for Degree via Hokie Spa. If approved, the student will be registered by the Graduate School for one credit hour – a non-refundable charge.

International students should refer to the Graduate School’s website for more information regarding “Start of Semester Defense Exception” and immigration requirements.

- ◆ For students with a scheduled defense date (**Green Light**), they will be given a final draft deadline for submission of the re-write they will defend before their committee. This will normally be at least 5 days before the scheduled defense to allow faculty members sufficient time to read the revised manuscript. Thus, students will typically have two weeks to make their revisions. This final draft should be sent to all three members of a student’s major paper committee. The filename format is: [lastname]FinalDraft[date]). Failure to meet this deadline will result in postponement of the paper defense and may prevent graduation.
- ◆ The Major Paper or Practicum defense is open to members of the university community (but not general public). It should typically take 60-90 minutes and will involve a formal interview and discussion about the paper in a university location (it may be a faculty office or seminar room). All three members of the student’s committee may attend but it is not unusual if one is absent or participating by phone or internet connection. Feedback and queries from this faculty member will normally be conveyed to and posed by the committee chair. If a student gets comments from a committee member before the defense, keep these and refrain from making alterations in the final draft until after the defense meeting. The major paper grade is either ‘satisfactory’ (EQ) or ‘unsatisfactory’ (F). If the latter, the student will not graduate.
- ◆ If the student’s work is deemed satisfactory, the student will be required to undertake a few final revisions and corrections of the major paper within 7-10 days. Once this is completed, the committee members will electronically approve the Major Paper defense through the ESS of the Graduate School as a record of outcome of the defense. The student is then approved for graduation with a Masters of Public and International Affairs from Virginia Tech.

I. MAJOR PAPER

II.

The major paper is not just another course. It is the summit of the degree, and it requires careful planning to complete with success. There are many potential pitfalls along the route so be prepared by being informed. If you don't obtain a satisfactory grade for your major paper you do not graduate no matter how many course credit you have. This document describes what a major paper is and how you are to proceed to write one. It explains the procedures you need to meet in order to present and defend your major paper.

The MPIA curriculum does not actually list a course with the title 'Major Paper.' The course you must sign up for is listed in the timetable of classes as **GIA 5904: Project and Report**.

What is a Major Paper?

A major paper is a journal article sized academic work on a subject determined by you in consultation with your advisor. There are a series of things you need to keep in mind:

- ◆ The topic of the paper must be approved by your advisor. You cannot decide on it alone.
- ◆ The model for the major paper is a journal article so you should consult some journals to determine what is involved. Your advisor will tell you which journal is to be the model for your major paper.
- ◆ The text of the major paper **MUST** be less than 10,000 words (excluding Bibliography; excessive use of footnotes or endnotes is discouraged). This is more than sufficient length to develop an argument and substantiate it. If the paper you are working on exceeds this length, this tells you it is too long and requires editing for greater concision and precision. At defense, the committee might in certain cases authorize revisions that allow the word limit to be exceeded.
- ◆ The major paper is not a thesis. Thus, it should not have chapters or a table of contents. However, it must have an abstract of 150 words or less with 6 key words identified.
- ◆ A major paper is evaluated by a three-person committee, with the student's advisor serving as chair and two other faculty members serving as readers. The key relationship is with an advisor; there is no need to meet with other committee members until the scheduled defense.
- ◆ Whether a student passes or not her defense is determined by all three committee members. After the student makes brief statements about the work and responds to all questions posed by the committee members, she leaves the room while the committee deliberates. The student is then invited back and the committee communicates whether she has passed the defense or not.

What formatting style should the paper follow?

All Major Papers should be Word documents which are double spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font. Please add page number, name the file following the convention outlined above, and indicate the word count on the front page below the title and your name. Check for viruses before sending.

For general information on major papers and theses see the Virginia Tech web site for Electronic Theses and Dissertations at: etd.vt.edu. You will use this site to submit the final version of your major paper so it is worth taking the time to become familiar with it before you write your major paper.

For information on the template for the title page of your major paper see:

<http://etd.vt.edu/guidelines/Template.doc>

Papers should follow the author-date system used by the journal *Political Geography*:

References and footnotes

References should be indicated in text either by giving, in parentheses the author's name followed by the date of the paper or book; or with the date in parentheses, as in 'suggested by Fletching (1975)'. In the text, use the form 'Olsen et al 1975' where there are more than two authors, but list all authors in the references. Quotations of more than two line of text from cited works should be indented and citation should include the page number of the quotation; e.g. (Thomas 1979: 56). There is no need for quotation marks: the indention signifies it is a quotation.

References should be listed in one alphabetical sequence at the end of the text. They should be typed double-spaced in journal style, e.g. for journals: Thornthwaite, C. W. and Mather, J. R. (1955) *The Water Balance*. Publications in Climatology (this title should be italicized) 8, 1-104.

for books:

Zeleny, M. (1982) *Multiple criteria decision making* (title should be italicized). McGraw-Hill, New York.

for monographs:

Bailey, A. (1978). *Politics and Planning: A New Approach* Oliver Publications (title italicized), London.

for papers from conference proceedings, chapters from a book etc.

Smith, I. J. K. (1977) *Liberal theories of the state*. In *Alternative Perspectives of the State* (title italicized) ed., P. Shed, pp. 17-82. Back Bay Press, Boston, MA.

Tables

Tables should be numbered consecutively in Arabic numerals and given a suitable caption. Notes and references within tables should be included with the tables, separately from the main text. Notes should be referred to by superscript letters. All table columns should have an explanatory heading. Tables should not repeat data available elsewhere in the article, e.g. in an illustration.

Illustrations

All graphs, diagrams, maps and other drawings should be referred to as Figures, which should be numbered consecutively in Arabic numerals and placed on separate sheets at the end of the manuscript. Their position should be indicated in the text. All illustrations must have captions, which should be typed on a separate sheet.

What are the essential elements of the major paper?

- Title
- Abstract: concisely states the paper's argument in no more than 150 words.
- Keywords: six

Introduction: All papers should have 'steering,' that is a 'road map' to the paper in the introductory section which (1) presents the research question (problem) motivating the research, (2) briefly explains the argument made in answering the question (or dealing with the problem at hand), and (3) outlines the different sections of the paper. The reader should know where the paper is going and why. This should be brief. Do not overdo this or repeat it elsewhere in the paper. Once is enough.

Methodology: The paper should state what method is being used and justify it. This can be brief and does not need to involve an elaborate justification of well established methodological avenues per se. Case selection must be justified.

Literature review: summarizes the main insights and arguments in the relevant literature(s) on the topic of discussion *and* situates the student's argument within this body of knowledge.

Case study analysis: presents the empirical research.

Conclusion: summarizes the paper's findings and reflects about possible implications.

Bibliography: follows the formatting instructions above

What makes a superior major paper?

A major paper advances and develops an argument. It is analytical. It does not tell a story. Consequently, the skills you have learnt writing analytical assignments are essential to writing a good paper. Below are some key things to keep in mind.

- ◆ The organization of the paper should be clear, coherent and logical. Sections should be balanced (i.e. not 10 pages on one section and 2 on another). Section headings are

mandatory and subheadings within them a good idea. Have a clear and logical transition in the paper between sections.

- ◆ Argument not description must be front and center in the major paper. However, you should be careful to avoid repetition. Do not state the argument over and over again. Present it as a logical case that you are making: you are building towards it. The final section will be the climax of the paper where the case comes together and you state it in full.
- ◆ Be efficient and precise in your reasoning: do not load up the paper with unnecessary detail. Avoid verbosity.
- ◆ Be clear about the difference between conceptual points (deductive reasoning) and empirical points (inductive reasoning).
- ◆ Engage and use academic readings: refer specifically to the texts under consideration (cite author, date and page); use detail in the service of argumentation. Do not overuse quotations.
- ◆ Avoid historical narrative: major papers are arguments and do not tell stories. Be aware of the danger of falling into a lazy organization of assignments around historical chronologies.
- ◆ Be Analytical: Get-to-the-point. Make every sentence count. Demonstrate that you have grasped the subject and worked out what you want to argue before writing rather than trying to figure out what you want to say as you write.
- ◆ Be concise: Remember that the art of writing a good paper is knowing what to edit and leave out. Just because you read it does not mean it must be included in the bibliography or discussed in the text. Ask yourself: does this help advance the argument or not? Use the discipline of length to clarify what is essential and what is not.
- ◆ Be specific, yet consider the (slightly) “bigger picture” beyond your immediate analysis.
 - What is your case study an instance of?
 - If one were to consider your argument to be reasonable, so what? (i.e., what does it add to our understanding of the topic being discussed?)

MAJOR PAPER DEFENSE: EVALUATION PROCESS

Argument	Design	Presentation
1. Sophistication of conceptualization. 2. Clarity of statement and exposition. 3. The relationship of details to concepts. 4. Robustness: how alternative arguments are managed. 5. Persuasiveness.	1. Abstract: clarity and effectiveness as summary. 2. Road map: how organization/design is explained at outset. 3. Logic: justification for methodological approach, case selection and organization of the paper. 4. Clarity: use of headings/subheadings. 5. Consistency and balance: symmetry of sections relative to each other.	1. Argument's relationship to narrative and description. 2. Verbosity. 3. Sentence length and subordinate clauses. 4. Economy of length and exposition. 5. Point organization and paragraph breaks. 6. Use of quotations. 7. Use of notes. 8. Referencing consistency. 9. Bibliographic organization.

II. PRACTICUM

The Practicum is a course of study that involves actually working in the professional domain and using the knowledge and skills that have been learned to create a knowledge product grounded in contemporary practice.

There are **three key differences between a Practicum and Major Paper**. First, the Major Paper is academic-oriented written paper whereas a Practicum is a professional work product that requires a formal presentation at defense. In word length, Practicum documents are shorter than Major Papers, but involve more emphasis on professional presentation and communication. Second, the Major Paper requires identification of an academic (theory relevant) research question and 'puzzle' whereas a Practicum requires an in-depth analysis of a public policy challenge and dilemma. Third, the audience for a Major Paper is mostly an academic one whereas the audience for a Practicum is the policy-making public. Oral communication through briefing presentation is part of a Practicum so students should be able to present and defend their ideas before a questioning audience.

In both instances, students are required to work with an adviser to identify and specify precisely a research topic. Advisers have the final say on whether a topic is acceptable or not. Advisers are allowed discretion to craft a Practicum capstone that they believe is best suited to the student's strengths and professional work context.

The final work product for the Practicum will be determined depending on the nature of the topic investigated or task to be completed. Students will consult with their advisors to devise a set of reasonable expectations about their Practicum. Together they will draw up a contract for the Practicum that will outline the nature of the work product (policy brief or background paper) and a timeline for its delivery. This must be completed by, at the latest, the end of the second week of the semester where the student has registered for a Practicum. Students need to meet with a potential faculty adviser to discuss a Practicum before the planned final semester so a clear set of expectations are established and agreed. These are to be completed by the student as outlined, and then presented and defended before a three person committee.

All Practicums involve a 20-minute presentation before a GIA examining committee. A handout of the presentation, involving 15 to 25 illustrations, must be presented to the faculty committee before the defense.

The written form of the Practicum involves a choice between two options:

1. A policy brief of 6,000 to 8,000 words. The policy brief will provide crucial background on a contemporary policy issue evaluating pros, cons, opportunities, and threats involved in various policy options. It will present an executive summary of the arguments it makes, and a series of recommendations. Policy briefs are professional documents that must examine a policy question from all sides. They are not briefs that involve the advancement of partisan political agendas or goals.
2. A policy background report of 6,000 to 8,000. This policy report will provide a comprehensive study of a contemporary policy issue, including its history and evolution,

and evaluate current policy options. The report will present data collected during the course of a focused research task agreed in advance with your adviser and (possibly) professional place of work.

A system of presentation and review similar to the Major Paper will apply to Practicum work. These must be delivered first to the student's adviser for feedback and review. A red, green and yellow light will be indicated, and clear set of revisions set forth for progress. If they are approved, a defense date and time will be provided and the student will then have to request this date through the VT Graduate School website. After approvals are obtained, the presentation of these efforts as part of the student's conclusion to their MPIA studies can proceed and a faculty committee will evaluate the student's performance (with input from a professional office director and/or intern director where relevant).

Below are some resources for people involved in writing policy memos/reports/briefs:

- Behn, Craft of Memo Writing
<http://www.hks.harvard.edu/thebehnreport/All%20Issues/Behn,%20Craft%20of%20Memo%20Writing%202012.pdf>
- Boston University Policy Paper Guidelines
<http://www.bu.edu/pardeeschool/academics/graduate/faqs/policy/>
- Brookings Institution, Memos to the President
<http://www.brookings.edu/about/projects/presidential-transition/memos-to-the-president>
- Duke University, How to Write an Op-Ed
<http://www.bu.edu/pardeeschool/academics/graduate/faqs/policy/>
- Smith, *Writing Public Policy: A Practical Guide to Communicating in the Policy-Making Process* (Oxford UP, 2012, 3rd edition), <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/writing-public-policy-9780199933921?cc=us&lang=en#>

Capstone Options: Major Paper or Practicum?

	Major Paper	Practicum
In a nutshell	Academic paper.	Professional work product.
Course number and availability	GIA 5904: Project and Report (3 credits) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open to all students - Fall or spring semester 	GIA 5964: Field Work/Practicum (3 credits) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Available to working professional part time students or full time interns in a professional office. - Fall or spring semester
Motivation	The goal of the MP is to contribute to an academic (theory-driven/relevant) discussion , revealing insight that is based on carefully researched evidence of an issue of interest.	Develop practical understanding of an issue prominent in a professional domain. Use the knowledge and skills that have been learned to create a knowledge product that is a contribution grounded in contemporary practice .
Role of advisor	<p>Students should choose and contact a faculty adviser at least two semesters before they plan on defending.</p> <p>Students will consult with advisors to devise a set of reasonable expectations about final product.</p> <p>The Major Paper Guidelines should be followed closely. The final draft of the Major Paper must be completed by, at the latest, three weeks before the end of the semester where the student has registered for the Practicum. The paper must be submitted to all committee members at least 7 days prior to the defense date.</p>	<p>Students should choose and contact a faculty adviser at least two semesters before they plan on defending.</p> <p>Student will consult with advisor to devise a set of reasonable expectations about final product.</p> <p>Student and adviser will draw up a contract for the Practicum that will outline the nature of the work product (policy brief or background paper) and a timeline for its delivery. This must be completed by, at the latest, the end of the second week of the semester where the student has registered for a Practicum.</p>
Committee	One GIA adviser + 2 GIA faculty members – responsible for the final evaluation of each student’s work.	One GIA adviser + 2 GIA faculty members – responsible for the final evaluation of each student’s work

<p>Final product</p>	<p>Single academically structured written paper (10,000 words document) based on coursework + oral defense.</p> <p>- Oral Defense: includes a brief (10 minutes) summary of the main argument followed by questions from the committee members.</p>	<p>20-minute presentation before a GIA examining committee + handout of the presentation, involving 15 to 25 illustrations (submitted to the committee before defense) + written product* + answers to questions from the committee.</p> <p>Emphasis on professional presentation and communication. Questions from the committee follow the student's presentation.</p> <p>*Written product: Students choose one option:</p> <p>- Option 1) A <u>POLICY BRIEF</u> of 6,000 to 8,000 words providing crucial background on a contemporary policy issue, evaluating pros, cons, opportunities, and threats involved in various policy options. A professional document that must examine a policy question from all sides. They are <i>not</i> briefs that involve the advancement of partisan political agendas or goals.</p> <p>- Option 2) A <u>POLICY BACKGROUND PAPER</u> of 6,000 to 8,000 providing a comprehensive study of a contemporary policy issue, including its history and evolution, and evaluate current policy options. The report will present data collected during the course of a focused research task agreed in advance with the student's adviser and (possibly) professional place of work.</p>
<p>Evaluation</p>	<p>Evaluation is conducted on the final draft of the MP and the answers to the committee's questions at the time of the defense.</p>	<p>Evaluation will be conducted on the final work product: presentation, handout, written product, and answers to the committee's questions at the time of the presentation.</p>

When do students sign up for a Major Paper or Practicum?

Students should sign up for and defend their Major Paper or Practicum during the regular academic year. The reason for this is that faculty are regular academic year employees (August to May) and are not available for supervision over the summer (this is typically the time faculty members are on field research).

Students should have submitted their Plan of Study before registering for GIA 5904 or GIA 5964. They must have finished at least 30 credit hours of regular courses and be in good academic standing. Students who want to take GIA 5904 or GIA 5964 at the same time as a final regular course need special permission from their advisor to do so. The norm is that students take either course as their sole academic undertaking during their final semester.

ACTION SUMMARY:

MPIA – FINAL SEMESTERS

Final semester of coursework (before GIA 5904)

- You have accumulated 30 credits, following the requirements listed in the MPIA handbook
- You are taking or have taken GIA5115 Research Methods
- You will meet with your major paper advisor before the end of the semester to discuss your topic and major paper committee composition.
- By the end of the semester you will have your Plan of Study filled out, signed by your committee, and submitted to the Graduate School
- You will enroll in GIA 5904 or GIA 5964 for the following semester

Major Paper or Practicum semester

- Meet with your advisor (again) early in the semester: Review the major paper and practicum rules and guidelines, agree on a schedule for draft submissions and tentative defense date.
- Advisor's feedback: green, yellow or red light.
- If you receive a green light, a date for defense is confirmed. You then request a final exam through the Graduate School's ESS.
- If you received a yellow light, work on corrections and suggestions shared with you by your advisor and resubmit. If a green light is received, follow the steps above.
- If authorized by your advisor, send the properly formatted second draft to all committee members (at least 5 days before defense).
- Defend your work with confidence