

MBA vs MPA

What's the Difference?

As you explore the differences between these two degrees, the biggest questions to ask yourself are: Where do you ultimately want to end up? What type of work do you want to do? If you want to work in the private sector, for a corporation or business, then a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree is likely your best option. However, if you want to work in the public sector, for a government agency, nonprofit organization, or education or healthcare administration, then a Master of Public Administration (MPA) degree might be a better fit.

NUMBERS OF PROGRAMS

- MBA: There are over 450 institutions in the U.S. that currently offer MBA programs
- MPA: There are approximately 200 institutions in the U.S. that currently offer MPA programs

ADMISSIONS TEST PREFERENCE

- MBA: The GMAT remains the most popular business school admissions test. However, more and more schools are recognizing and accepting the GRE (Graduate Record Examination) as an acceptable alternative.
- MPA: GRE. This is essentially the reverse of the MBA requirement. While some MPA programs accept the GMAT, some don't, so it's best to take the GRE.

PRIOR WORK EXPERIENCE

- MBA: Applicants traditionally have 2-5 years of work experience prior to entering their MBA program. Business schools value students who can draw from real-life work experience to contribute practical problem-solving skills to the classroom.
- MPA: Work experience prior to an MPA program is helpful, but it is not required to the same extent as it is for an MBA program.

PROGRAM LENGTH

- MBA: The traditional program is 2 years full-time. There are also executive and online programs offered. However, opportunities upon graduating from these programs rather than the traditional program may differ from the information presented here.
- MPA: Like the MBA, the traditional program is 2 years full-time, with executive and online programs also available.

COURSEWORK EMPHASIS

- MBA: Candidates begin by taking core business courses in areas like finance, marketing, and human resources management. Once this coursework has been completed, students often choose to specialize in one of these areas, often taking additional courses in accounting, sales, and consulting. Courses taken by all students teach the essential business principles and practices needed to compete in different business areas.
- MPA: Candidates study subjects such as budget processing, management, administrative law, urban planning, community development, and public financing. Courses within an MPA program might also allow students to focus on a specialty, like the American political process, public policy, health policy, international relations, organizational leadership, and budgeting. Courses taken by all students teach them how to conduct research, evaluate program effectiveness and perform data analyses.

EARNING POTENTIAL

- MBA: Salaries vary widely based upon location, experience, and area of specialization, the average starting salary for MBA graduates is typically around \$115,000 per year.
- MPA: Salaries also vary widely here, but it is important to recognize that the average starting salary for MPA graduates is considerably lower than MBA grads, typically around \$68,000 per year.

DEGREE RECOGNITION

- MBA: Within the business world, an MBA degree is easily recognized and understood. Most people are familiar with MBA programs and the type of work MBA graduates are qualified to perform.
- MPA: The MPA degree is less universally recognized. Depending on the industry, as an MPA graduate, you may need to explain what exactly an MPA is, how it's different from an MBA, and the type of work it qualifies you for.

PRIOR COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS

- MBA: There is no specific coursework required prior to application, but applicants who do not have statistics and accounting will usually be asked to complete a certain number of credits in those subjects before they can start their MBA program. Business schools will work with admitted applicants on an individual basis to ensure that they have the necessary coursework completed.
- MPA: There is no specific coursework required prior to application. MPA programs also like to see applicants with statistics and accounting, but generally don't require them prior to matriculation the way MBA programs do.

RECRUITING DIFFERENCES

- MBA: Companies often come to business school campuses to recruit and interview MBA candidates for post-graduation jobs. As a result, many MBA students have jobs lined up prior to completing their programs.
- MPA: MPA candidates typically see fewer on-campus recruiters.