PUBLIC AFFAIRS: B.A., B.S., B.P.S.

As a student of Public Affairs, you will be well-equipped to serve society through public service, civic engagement, political and government careers, public communications or nonprofit service. The interdisciplinary Public Affairs area of study will prepare you with leadership and decision-making skills to operate in the public interest, addressing social issues and societal concerns.

As you work toward your degree, you will examine the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of your chosen concentration, meanwhile gaining an understanding of American governmental and public institutions, within their social context, and becoming familiar with the broad and complex economic, financial and legal environments within which public institutions function. Students in Public Affairs have the opportunity to engage intellectually with ethical questions related to the area of concentration, and the values that drive the development of public policy. As a Public Affairs student, you will sharpen your skills in writing, research and critical reading and thinking, as, together with a faculty mentor, you create a program to meet your specific needs and goals.

For some concentrations, specific technical or scientific knowledge might be necessary.

Why choose a degree in Public Affairs?
The practical skills and breadth of knowledge you obtain through your degree can prepare you for:

• Graduate school,
• Law school,
• Government service,
• Journalism,
• Leadership in emergencies, or
• Making policy.

Degrees Available
As a regionally accredited college of the State University of New York, SUNY Empire State College offers only the following bachelor's degrees in the Public Affairs area of study:

• Bachelor of Arts
• Bachelor of Science
• Bachelor of Professional Studies
• Combined B.A./B.S./B.P.S. in Public Affairs/M.A. in Community and Economic Development

Taking individual courses as a nondegree student also is possible and will offer you the same range and depth of courses and rigorous standards as matriculated undergraduate students.

Popular Concentrations

• Public Administration
• Public Policy
• Criminal Justice
• Public Communications

• Health Policy
• Emergency Management

You can focus on a single area such as political science, or create an interdisciplinary concentration that connects or combines perspectives exploring a theme or topic.

For sample degree programs and other degree planning resources, please visit the Department of Social Science and Public Affairs Degree Planning Resources web page. (https://www.esc.edu/social-science-public-affairs/degree-planning-resources/)

Public Affairs is an interdisciplinary field devoted to the study of organizations and individuals that operate in what is considered the public interest, including social issues and problems. The area of study is designed for those who are interested in serving and bettering society through public service, civic engagement, political and government careers, public communications or non-profit service. The Public Affairs Area of Study is commonly pursued with the aim of advancing careers in Public Administration, Public Policy, Homeland Security, and Emergency Management to name a few.

Students with a degree in Public Affairs should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the nine foundations listed below. These foundations may be met through transcript credit; college-level knowledge demonstrated through individual prior learning assessment (iPLA), professional learning evaluations (PLE), or credit by examination; or individual courses, a series of courses, or components within individual courses with Empire State College. The student’s Degree Plan Rationale Essay should clearly explain how the degree plan meets each of the foundations in the concentration, what will be learned, and how the student will build on these foundations to meet personal, academic, or career goals.

Foundation #1: Theoretical and Philosophical Concepts
• Learning outcome: Students will be able to define fundamental concepts and theories related to government, public administration, and/or public policy.

Foundation #2: Comparative Perspectives
• Learning outcome: Students will be able to compare ideologies and practices that define public sector organizations.
• Learning outcome: Students will be able to discuss how public institutions vary across time, place and culture.

Foundation #3: Historical Perspectives
• Learning outcome: Students will be able to examine the historical origins of U.S. public institutions.

Foundation #4: Social Contexts of Power and Privilege
• Learning Outcome: Students will be able to explain perspectives on power and privilege using concepts and theories from the Social Sciences.
• Learning Outcome: Students will be able to analyze social institutions and their influence on systems of power and privilege.

Foundation #5: Legal Environment
• Learning Outcome: Students will be able to discuss practical issues of law, rulemaking, and judicial decisions that influence public affairs theory and practice in the U.S.
• Learning Outcome: Students will be able to assess how constitutional dynamics affect policy-making processes across the public sector.

Foundation #6: Economic, Financial or Budgetary Issues
• Learning outcome: Students will be able to analyze the economic and financial environments in which public institutions operate.
• Learning Outcome: Students will be able to explain how budgeting and financial practices affect public policy processes and procedures, and shape fiscal outcomes.

Foundation #7: Ethics and Values
• Learning outcome: Students will be able to analyze ethical issues related to the values – good, bad, or indifferent – that society place on the development of public policy.

Foundation #8: Research Skills and Information Analysis
• Learning outcome: Students will be able to summarize tools and methods used in social scientific research.
• Learning outcome: Students will be able to apply quantitative, qualitative, or other relevant research skills.

Foundation #9: Technical Knowledge
• Learning outcome: Students will be able to apply specific technical or scientific knowledge and skills relevant to their concentration or professional goals.