

John F. Kennedy School of Government

by David Gorman

COLLEGE GRADUATION PLACES MANY individuals at a crossroads of professional choices. If yours include careers in politics or government yet you find an education in law too vocational, you may want to consider a graduate program like one of those offered at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Founded in the late sixties, the Kennedy School's purpose is to prepare leaders for service, particularly in government, but in other institutions as well. In fact, the architecture of the school itself is designed with this end in mind. Located between the Business School and the balance of Harvard's facilities, three buildings house the school and, through a multi-leveled forum space, give the school a unique town meeting environment for a wide range of public policy debates, television programs, lectures and conferences.

The school's faculty is of the peerless quality one would expect of Harvard. Most of the faculty have Ph.D. degrees and a significant number have more than one. In fact, it is the exceptional faculty or administration member that does not have at least three advanced degrees. Among the personalities affiliated with and teaching at Kennedy are A. Leon

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Higginbotham and Samuel Huntington. Harvard itself is seen to have been the alma mater of a great deal of the faculty at one time or another. Because the policy making process is complex, the educational programs are designed specifically for public managers but does not train specialists. Each Kennedy degree is designed to provide a blend of skills and techniques that will enable graduates to deal with the varied areas in high levels of responsibility in government and the non-profit sectors. To accomplish this and to meet the diverse educational and career needs of the seven hundred or so students matriculating at Kennedy, the school offers four basic graduate programs leading to the Master of Public Policy, Master of City and Regional Planning, Master in Public Administration and the Mid-Career Master in Public Administration. Should that not be enough to keep you busy, there are fifteen research centers and programs that analyze and advise policy makers on issues that cover the spectrum of government involvement.

The difference between the degrees lies in their content of study and the composition of their student body. The Mid-Career Master in Public Administration is a one year program for executives already working in government administration. The program is self designed, with the presumption that the candidate will select whichever is most appropriate for his or her needs as a public administrator. Similarly, the Master in Public Administration degree, called the MPA2 because it is



Courtesy of Harvard University

more traditional two year program, is also self designed. According to the 1993-1994 catalogue for the Kennedy School, "the MPA2 program is quite small and designed for students whose background and career aspirations - in the school's determination - make it more suitable for them. The school will direct most applicants toward the MPP program..."

This program, the Master in Public Policy, equips future public and non profit managers with the conceptual framework they will require in their careers. The curriculum is oriented towards problem analysis and solving, though the school does not work exclusively by the case method employed pioneered at Harvard. There are nine core classes of the eighteen required for the degree: Responsibilities of Public Action, Economics I and II, Empirical Analysis I and II, Political and Organizational Analysis, Policy Analysis and the Management of the Policy Development Process, Managing Public Organizations and Elective and Advocacy Politics (it is the content of these courses that the applicant must demonstrate as knowing thoroughly to successfully be accepted to the MPA2 program). Eight of these are taken during the first year with two electives, with the balance of the course work completed in the second year. Other requirements include one course in finance, one elective in the area of concentration (Criminal Justice and Policy Management, or Business and Government, for example) a Policy Analysis Exercise as well as four electives.

If the matriculant is especially interested in state or local government, he or she may choose to earn the Master in City and Regional Planning after the first year of course work is completed. As the degree's name implies, it is very specific, concentrating on regional policy problems such as housing, community development or transportation.

Each entering class is comprised of approximately 220 degree candidates from public, private, foreign, and military colleges, just over half are male and about one quarter of whom are people of color. The average age is 25, though about one fifth of the student body matriculates at Kennedy directly after college. Most students have had at least one year on full-time work experience, but the Catalogue "strongly encourages applicants to obtain at least two years of work experience prior to enrolling in the

MPP program".

Like every other school within the University, admissions to any degree program at the Kennedy School is extremely competitive. Undergraduate grade point average, work and public experience, as well as standardized test scores (the school prefers the GRE, but accepts GMAT scores) factor into the decision making process. Naturally, the Admission Committee places special emphasis on the personal statements and essay questions on the application to get a sense of where each applicant is coming from and where they are hoping to go-

Joint or concurrent degrees are available only within Harvard. In recent years, there have been students enrolled in Kennedy and at Harvard's Schools of Business, Law, Medicine and Design.

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Prospective candidates must satisfy the application requirements for both schools and be admitted to both schools to be considered for the joint program.

The career paths taken by MPP graduates are focused mainly in the public sector. About seventy percent of the graduates of a recent class were placed in positions in federal, state, or local government. Because many Kennedy students have had significant professional experience, it seems that jobs found outside the public sector are a function of professional experience combined with the prestige of a Harvard degree. For example, jobs taken by recent recipients of the MPP have been a Presidential Management Intern with the Office of Management & Budget, an Associate with the World Bank, a Consultant for Price Waterhouse, and a Senior Production Associate for ABC News. MPA2 recipients take similar positions: a Public Finance Associate at Morgan Stanley, a Program Director for Africare or a Senior Consultant with the Policy

Economics Group, for example. Compensation is commensurate with job function, location and prestige, but the school did not have a placement figure available for its graduates at the time this article was written.

The cost of attendance at the Kennedy School is comparable to that of similar private institutions. The annual tuition for the MPP candidate if currently \$16,630. The school estimates the total cost of attendance, including fees, tuition, and expenses to total \$32,212. The costs for the other degrees are about the same. Most of the grant and scholarship funds available are need based, with eligibility determined by the federal method of student and family contributions. However, special attention is paid to the probability that the student will work in the comparatively low paying public service sector when the financial aid package is determined. Loans are the most important form of financing to the Kennedy School student.

Student life at Kennedy is varied. As might be expected, the most numerous student organizations are political, with several different caucuses and clubs running the gamut from the Republican Club to the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Caucus. There is a Soccer Club, and a very well developed and active Community Service Action Network. For the more scholarly minded, there are four student publications and lecture series that attract a multitude of speakers in a variety of areas. Within the larger Harvard and Cambridge communities, there are plenty of museums, shops and cafes complete with live music and plenty of interesting personalities. However, the area can also be very quiet, calm and residential. There are no dormitories for the Kennedy School; students live in either on or off-campus apartments that can be let by or independent of the University which would allow for as much or as little involvement in campus life as each individual desires.

In short, the school provides graduate programs for a diverse group of individuals whose professional goals lie somewhere between business and law. However, it is important to remember that Kennedy's mission is to train managers for the public sector: if this is your ambition, Kennedy is well worth a close look.

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