

### Collaborative Master of Research and Public Policy (MRPP)

#### 1. Introduction

The collaborative Master of Research and Public Policy is a graduate programme in Africa with a dual focus on social science research *and* public policy (as distinct from public administration or public management). It is attractive to those who wish to be researchers and future academics as well as those who wish to use research as policy practitioners.

#### 2. Programme Structure

The MRPP is delivered using a common architecture, course content and teaching practices, with the degree granted by each university using common assessment standards and thesis requirements. The programme is full-time and organized around:

- Five courses every semester and a total of four semesters;
- Duration of two calendar years;
- Use of the long break for field experience and data collection for students; and, professional development, programme development and research activities for teaching staff;
- Foundation courses, concentration course electives and optional university specific electives; and,
- A thesis at the end of the fourth semester.

The programme architecture (see page 2) portrays a coherent sequence of courses, field experience and space for preparation of thesis. Learning experiences progressively move students towards attaining competencies in two pathways:

- A **“research” pathway** for students who are primarily interested in doing policy relevant research who may aspire to undertake advanced scholarship, teach in African universities and/or work in research in think tanks and other types of research organisations.
- A **“policy practice” pathway** for students primarily interested in using research as policy practitioners who aspire to influence, inform or shape public policy, through work in national and sub-national government bodies, think tanks, advocacy organisations, media, private sector, regional or international organisations.

#### 3. Expected learning outcomes

- An advanced knowledge of different conceptual and methodological approaches to social science research;
- An advanced knowledge of various theoretical and conceptual approaches to the formulation and analysis of public policy;
- Competency in research techniques to design and execute policy-oriented social science research;
- Ability to apply policy analysis and development tools to different kinds of public policy issues; and,
- Advanced capability of the utilization of evidence-based research in the process of developing and implementing public policy.

#### 4. MRPP COURSES

The MRPP curriculum includes 10 foundation courses and 6 concentration courses.

- **Foundation** courses address competencies needed by students on both pathways.
- **Concentration** courses consolidated competencies associated with one path or the other.

##### 4.1 FOUNDATION COURSES

The 10 foundation courses are summarised below:

##### A. Qualitative Research Methods for Public Policy

This is a foundation course in qualitative methodology and research methods for public policy. The course provides a ground for the Advanced Qualitative Research Methods course. It introduces

students to fundamental principles of research design and methodological choice; foundational qualitative methods, including archival, ethnographic, interviews, action-research, power-analysis methods, data coding and analysis; and research proposal writing and writing up of results/findings. Students will gain basic knowledge to be able to recognise, appreciate, and commission research based on a wide range of methods.

### **B. Quantitative Research Methods for Public Policy**

This is a foundation course that also prepares students for the Advanced Quantitative Research Methods course. Effective formation, implementation and evaluation of public policy depend on the quality and accuracy of information collected. Thus public policy scholars and practitioners need know quantitative methods to collect, organize, present, analyze and interpret mass numerical data needed for formulating and evaluating public policy. The course explores the causes and consequences of selection on observable and unobservable characteristics in quantitative analysis, including how such selection can impede attempts to infer causality. Students learn methods used to estimate the causal effect of policies on outcomes, including instrumental variables and regression discontinuity. They learn how to conduct statistical inference when using these techniques and assess the appropriateness of their underlying assumptions in specific scenarios.

### **C. Public Policy Development and Analysis**

This is a foundation course designed to expose students to the conceptual tools, knowledge, skills and competencies as well as the materials needed by practitioners and researchers in public policy areas. The course focuses on the key conceptual, theoretical and practical underpinnings of public policy management and analysis. Also it addresses the nature of public policy, its context, and techniques and tools for the formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policy. Using learner-centred, problems-oriented and multidisciplinary synthesis approaches, the course bridges the gap between theory and practice in public policy management and analysis. This course provides the foundation for coverage of the Applied Policy Analysis Course.

### **D. Governance and Politics in Public Policy**

This course examines the dynamic processes of governance and politics in policy-making. It provides an engagement with the broader contexts of the theory and practice of public policy. It also explains the institutions and ideas that animate politics and governance and their implications for public policy in Africa. It explores formal and informal dimensions of politics and governance, including other key actors, and how the policy process is shaped by different institutions and actors. It provides students with knowledge for sharpening their understanding of decision-making, accountability, and the ability of African governments to meet broad social goals.

### **E. Social Science Foundations of Public Policy**

This course gives an overview of the major social science approaches used in the conduct of theory, research and real-world public policy. The course covers eight key disciplines that inform government decisions and public resource allocations: anthropology, sociology, psychology, political science, economics, law, geography and demography. The aim is to outline, for non social scientists, the key disciplinary approaches that will enable both policy scientists and policy practitioners to contextualize the work they do.

### **F. Economics for Public Policy**

This course is designed to provide students with an opportunity to understand the economic issues related to public policy and the public sector. It explores the historical overview of economic issues and actors to provide an analytical framework for understanding why, how, and with what success/failure government intervenes in economy. Broad economic issues (growth and sustainable development, population growth and economic development, agricultural transformation and development, rural-urban migration, environment food security, inflation, unemployment, poverty, inequality and social protection, and economic globalization) are discussed. Micro and macro economics foundations and how they relate with public policy are explored as well as public finance, fiscal policy and monetary policy.

### **G. Ethics in Research and Public Policy**

This course explores the range of ethical issues and choices that confront policy developers and researchers in order to develop skills in recognizing and resolving them. The course begins with a discussion of the theories and conceptual frameworks related to ethics, values and morality, and how they apply to research and policy development. It focuses on moral reasoning, and is designed to expose students to a wide variety of the moral conundrums that public officials and researchers confront.

### **H. Research, Policy and Public Interface**

This course provides the opportunity for students in both the research and policy pathways to be exposed to issues of research commissioning, design, development, as well as communication for public policy. The course focuses on the interface between the research and policy communities and the wider public.

### **I. Social Diversity, Gender, Equity and Public Policy**

One of the major challenges confronting public policy in modern times is how to overcome overt and subtle discrimination in the art of governance, economic growth and development. The focus of the course is the discourse on social differences, and how state and society have responded to the growing demands for inclusive growth and social justice in development. Students will learn how evidence from reflective research contributes to the unfolding paradigm shift towards embracing social diversity and equity with special reference to race, gender, ethnicity and disability, to name a few. The course highlights how policy instruments influence the process of income distribution across different social groups; and how public policy can be used to address people's freedoms across different social groups.

### **J. Leadership and Public Policy**

Public Policy making is deficient in many respects due to poor leadership skills and insufficient understanding of what is required for its successful implementation. This makes it important to expose students to the various types of leadership and the successful strategies and frameworks employed by different leaders in developing policies for its efficient management. The primary objective is to develop visionary leaders who can drive the policy process and translate good ideas into concrete action. In addition, the course aims at developing students' capacity to learn the role and application of leadership skills vis-à-vis practical problem-solving skill and techniques drawing on concepts and frameworks from interdisciplinary areas; and how they can be applied to specialized areas like social policy, education, health, etc.

## **4.2 CONCENTRATION COURSE ELECTIVES**

The six concentration courses are summarized below:

### **A. Advanced Qualitative Methods for Public Policy**

This course consolidates training in the foundational qualitative methods and provides knowledge and practice of additional qualitative methods, some of which are more specialized and advanced. More time is given to the practice of applying research methods to public policy issues. The aim is to produce students who can practice the methods they have been taught in class, and apply those methods to improving public policy.

### **B. Advanced Quantitative Methods**

Students are equipped with critical and analytical skills and an in-depth knowledge to understand, design, conduct and critically appraise research in public policy using quantitative methods. This course introduces the student to methods of empirical inquiry in the social sciences and includes statistical principles such as Randomised Control Trials, Correlation and Regression Analysis, Statistical Testing and Prediction. The course helps students to test hypotheses, empirically fit models, produce predictions, or estimate policy impacts based upon quantitative or statistical analysis.

### **C. Political Economy of Public Policy**

This course is designed to introduce students to the political economy as an approach to understanding, analysing and designing public policy. Given that there are a variety of different schools of political economy, this course examines Marxist, neo-Weberian, and New Institutional approaches to political economy to understand their main analytical tools and gain an appreciation of their strengths and weaknesses in analysing different areas of public policy.

### **D. Applied Policy Analysis**

The course enables students to plan and execute policy analysis in the real world. Using a problem-oriented and a multidisciplinary synthesis approach, the course bridges the gap between theory and practice in the public policy analysis function. Students use theoretical and conceptual knowledge to perform policy analysis in real life situations. They address public policy problems practically by using analytical skills and policy tools to identify or define solutions to public policy issues and problems.

### **E. Contemporary Issues in Public Policy**

This course examines contemporary issues of public policy and then explores challenges that impact on the policy process. The fundamental concern is that policy problems change over time and therefore it is critical to understand the dynamics of change in Public Policy. Thus the course provides an in-depth analysis of current, real policy problems in different domains and then identifies commonalities and differences in the analytical and developmental processes necessary to determine the range of possible policy interventions and their inter-dependence.

### **F. Global Context of Public Policy**

This course seeks to provide students with a critical understanding of the global context within which public policy is formulated and implemented. Students will be exposed to the ideas of globalization, key state and non-state actors as well as global networks, and why some policy issues (such as terrorism or HIV and AIDS) rapidly become global public policy problems while others (such as global income inequality) simply move in slow-motion.