

# Preparing for Political Science Careers: Getting a Master of International Affairs

What is an MIA degree?

- An MIA is a Masters degree in International Affairs. It is usually a two-year degree program, though there are comparable one-year programs.

What is it good for?

- **Applications**, for employment and/or more education. It makes you stand out more when you apply for law school, a Ph.D. program, or plum jobs. Think of it as white collar finishing school.
- **Networking**. Meet tomorrow's movers-and-shakers today. Also good for getting jobs.
- **Training** for a career in government service, international business, think tanks, or working for a non-governmental organization (NGO).

What should I beware of?

- **Opportunity cost**. MIA programs are expensive and scholarships are rare. They are no guarantee for a high-paying, meaningful job. Attending one means not only paying lots of money in tuition and board but also giving up two years of income.
- **Golden handcuffs**. Just because you can get loans doesn't mean you should. There is nothing wrong with going into debt or working hard, but make reasonably sure that you will not have to take a job after graduation that you hate just to pay back your MIA loans. Getting some work experience before applying to a MIA program will help you know what you are getting into.
- **An under-informed decision**. Discuss post-graduation plans with your professors, do lots of online research, see what people whose jobs you want did to get to where they are. More information is better; look before you leap.

How do I get into an MIA program?

Admissions committee members weight different factors uniquely. Try to do the following as well as you can:

- **Grades**. Get good marks in hard classes. Take courses relevant to what you want to work on in graduate school. Economics, statistics, history, and foreign language study help.
- **Recommendations**. Not all of your letters of reference need to come from tenure-line faculty, but most should. Take classes with regular faculty; go to office hours. Open a letter dossier at career services and ask for recommendations soon after the end of a term.

- **Personal statement.** Tell a finely-chiseled story linking your college course of study and activities, to what you want to do in graduate school, to what you want to do after you have your MIA. Show focus and intelligence. No typos, disorganization, or extraneous material.
- **GRE scores.** This is not an aptitude test; it is a set of skills that can and must be practiced for. Taking classes has pluses and minuses, but the important point is to study early and often for your GRE. Go to the writing center, study vocabulary, relearn math and logic.
- **Experience.** Neat internships and job experience are not mandatory, but they can help. Talk to faculty about what you might want to do and apply to various positions early and often.
- **Apply widely.** Competition is fierce and nothing assures you of admission. Play the odds.