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MPAs View Federal Employment: Incentives and Impediments

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From a nationwide sample of 28 programs listed with the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, 477 first-year (mostly MPA) graduate students were surveyed. Federal civil service employment was found to be not nearly as appealing to these first-year students as expected. Federal jobs were a priority for only about one fourth of these students. Most viewed Federal jobs as offering attractive benefits and job security, but no other features were widely viewed as positive. The single most powerful predictor of affinity for Federal jobs was having the personal career priority of having Aa real impact on national issues@ and believing that Federal jobs offer that opportunity. Also, compared to other MPA students, those students who were optimistic about job security and personal growth in Federal jobs were significantly more interested in such careers. Along with these opinion factors, the attraction to Federal jobs was stronger among those who have friends and relatives who work for the government. Converting student interest into actual workers confronted at least one serious obstacle. Even students who were eager to get a Federal job believed that doing so would probably be a prolonged and laborious process.

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