

Master's Degree in Electoral Policy and Administration

GENERAL INFORMATION

WHAT IS THE MA IN ELECTORAL POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION?

The Master in Electoral Policy and Administration (MEPA) is a specialised online programme designed to equip current and aspiring election professionals with in-depth knowledge and practical skills in electoral processes and administration. Offered by UNITAR in collaboration with [Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna](#) and [International IDEA](#), MEPA combines academic excellence with real-world expertise to meet the growing global demand for qualified electoral professionals.

The programme is available in English, French, Portuguese, and Arabic, ensuring accessibility to a diverse global audience.

WHEN DOES THE PROGRAMME START?

The next programme cohorts start in **12 April 2026**, for Spring (application deadline 22 March) and **12 October 2026**, for Fall (application deadline 21 September).



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PHD Candidate BM, MBA, MEPA,
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GRADUATE HIGHLIGHT

Pursuing a Master's in Electoral Policy and Administration was a transformative step in my career, aligning with my commitment to strengthening democratic governance. As an electoral practitioner, I sought specialised knowledge to complement my experience, gaining a robust understanding of electoral design, policy development, and administration. This academic foundation also strengthened my research and decision-making, enabling me to conduct key studies such as "Comparative Insights on EMB Independence: A Deep Dive into South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe Board Appointment Processes" and an "In-depth analysis of Zambia's electoral framework and EMB independence."

The programme's practical content enriched my skills and connected me with international best practices, enabling me to deliver better technical expertise to organizations such as the UN, Commonwealth, ICGLR, SNPIWFD and IGAD among others. These experiences have reinforced my role as a thought leader and trusted advisor in electoral management.

Currently, as a consultant and Senior Electoral Advisor for IFES, I apply these insights to advance global electoral systems, promoting fair governance and thriving democracies. This journey has enriched my career and deepened my impact on policies that improve citizens' lives.

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WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS PROGRAMME?

The Master in Electoral Policy and Administration (MEPA) programme is ideal for individuals currently working or aspiring to work as election administrators, members of Election Management Bodies, electoral observers, or any professionals involved in electoral policy and administration.

- **Comprehensive Understanding of Electoral Processes:** Demonstrate advanced knowledge of electoral systems, legal frameworks, and operational procedures across various electoral phases and contexts.
- **Analysis and Strategic Planning:** Acquire analytical skills to assess electoral challenges, formulate strategic plans, and implement effective electoral management strategies.
- **Election Management Expertise:** Master techniques and best practices in election administration, including voter registration, logistics, budgeting, and security, to ensure efficient electoral operations.
- **Development of Electoral Policies and Practices:** Access and apply knowledge to develop and refine electoral policies, practices, and procedures that uphold democratic principles and integrity.
- **Leadership in Electoral Governance:** Lead and manage electoral processes with proficiency, promoting transparency, inclusivity, and public trust in electoral institutions.
- **Effective Communication and Diplomacy:** Utilize advanced communication and diplomatic skills to engage stakeholders, resolve electoral disputes, and foster consensus for fair and credible elections.

COURSE DETAILS

WHAT IS THE MODE OF DELIVERY?

The MEPA programme embodies a student-centred, multidisciplinary philosophy, leveraging the workplace and e-learning environment for experiential learning.

WHAT IS THE DURATION OF THE PROGRAMME?

The MEPA Master's Degree is designed to provide a comprehensive and flexible learning experience. The online component spans nine months and includes twelve compulsory modules alongside a selection of twelve optional modules, each carrying 2–4 ECTS credits. Participants may choose optional modules totaling up to 12 ECTS, bringing the module component to 47 ECTS credits. The programme concludes with a three-month Master Thesis, worth 15 ECTS, with a required length of 15,000–20,000 words. For those undertaking an internship, a shorter thesis of 7,000–10,000 words is permitted. An optional residential phase of up to three weeks in Pisa offers practical learning, networking opportunities, and the possibility of earning an additional 5 ECTS credits.

For professionals seeking targeted expertise without committing to the full Master's programme, MEPA offers individual modules. Each module carries 2–4 ECTS credits and is awarded with a Certificate of Completion upon successful evaluation. Fees range from €700 to €950 per module, with discounts of 10% for the second and third modules and 15% for the fourth through sixth modules. Participants can also take part in the optional residential phase to enhance their practical skills, deepen their knowledge, and connect with a global community of electoral professionals.

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CURRICULUM

WHAT ARE THE CORE MODULES FOR THE MA AWARD?

The MEPA syllabus comprises 12 compulsory modules and 12 optional modules. Each module is assigned 2–4 ECTS credits based on complexity. Participants must complete all compulsory modules and select optional modules totalling up to 12 ECTS. ECTS credits for each module are issued only after successful completion of assessments and full compliance with the Master Program Procedural Guidelines.

12 Compulsory Modules:

- 2 ECTS: **Elections and Voting as Instruments of Governance**
- 3 ECTS: **Electoral Legal and Regulatory Frameworks**
- 3 ECTS: **Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs)**
- 3 ECTS: **Electoral Systems and Managing Representation**
- 3 ECTS: **Political Parties, Campaigns, and Political Finance**
- 3 ECTS: **Electoral Planning and Budgeting**
- 3 ECTS: **Voter Registration and Identification Systems**
- 3 ECTS: **Electoral Operations**
- 2 ECTS: **Marginalized Electorates and Special Voting Programs**
- 4 ECTS: **Electoral Integrity and Malpractice**
- 3 ECTS: **Electoral Justice Systems**
- 3 ECTS: **Policy Advice and Electoral Reform**

12 Optional Modules:

- 3 ECTS: **Understanding and Managing Boundary Delimitation**
- 4 ECTS: **Electoral Logistics**
- 2 ECTS: **Gender and Elections**
- 3 ECTS: **Managing Elections in Public Emergency Situations**
- 3 ECTS: **Election Integrity in the Digital Age**
- 2 ECTS: **Civic and Voter Education**
- 2 ECTS: **Media and Elections**
- 2 ECTS: **Managing Electoral Security, Electoral Violence, and Preventing Election-related conflicts**
- 3 ECTS: **Elections in Fragile / Post Conflict contexts**
- 3 ECTS: **Electoral Observation, Evaluation, and Validation**
- 2 ECTS: **Direct Democracy**
- 2 ECTS: **Leadership in Electoral Administration (under construction)**

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EXIT AWARDS AND CERTIFICATION

ARE OTHER POSSIBLE EXIT AWARDS IN THE MEPA PROGRAMME?

The MEPA programme offers multiple ways for participants to earn academic recognition, depending on the pathway they choose, whether completing the full Master or selected individual modules.

1. First-Level University Master's Diploma

Awarded to students who successfully complete the full MEPA programme, this diploma is issued by Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna pursuant to Italian law (Ministerial Decree No. 270/2004).

To obtain the Master's Diploma, students must:

- Attend the full training syllabus;
- Successfully complete all compulsory modules and a selection of optional modules (up to a maximum of 12 ECTS credits from optional modules);
- Submit and publicly defend the Master Thesis (15,000–20,000 words; a shorter version of 7,000–10,000 words, is allowed for those completing an internship);
- Comply with all obligations outlined in the Master Program Procedural Guidelines for Students;
- Be up to date with enrolment fee payments.
- MA ECTS Breakdown:
 - **47 ECTS:** awarded upon completion of all online compulsory and selected optional modules, including positive evaluation of intermediate and final assessments;
 - **15 ECTS:** awarded upon successful completion and public defence of the Master Thesis;
 - **5 ECTS (optional):** may be earned by attending the residential phase in Pisa or completing additional optional modules.
 - **Maximum Total:** 67 ECTS
 - **Minimum Required to Earn the Diploma:** 62 ECTS

***Note:** ECTS credits for optional modules are issued only after positive evaluation of all assessments and full compliance with the Master Program Procedural Guidelines.

2. Certificate of Completion for Individual Modules

Participants who enrol in and complete individual MEPA modules (without completing the full Master) receive:

- A Certificate of Completion;
- ECTS credits corresponding to the module(s) completed (2–4 ECTS per module, depending on complexity)

Key points for individual modules:

- Students must successfully pass the intermediate and final assessments for each module.
- Optional modules can contribute up to 12 ECTS credits toward the total Master programme if later combined.
- Certificates are issued only after compliance with the Master Program Procedural Guidelines for Students.

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APPLICATION AND ADMISSION

WHAT IS THE APPLICATION DEADLINE?

- **Spring Cohort:** Apply before 22 March for 12 April start.
- **Fall Cohort:** Apply before 21 September for 12 October start.

WHAT ARE THE APPLICATION PERIODS?

Applications are accepted twice a year, depending on the programme start date. Please check the specific registration period and course commencement dates on the UNITAR or Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna website. Applications received after the final deadline are evaluated case by case on a rolling basis.

HOW CAN I APPLY?

For a detailed guide on how to apply, please refer to the **tutorial video**: [How to Apply Online](#).

Steps to Apply for the Full Master programme

1. Visit the website: <https://www.santannapisa.it/en/istanza-master/master-electoral-policy-administration>
2. Upload the completed application form during the online application procedure.
3. Provide the requested information and upload the mandatory documents:
 - Copy of passport or identification card
 - Copies of all mentioned degrees (e.g., BA, MA, PhD)
 - Official transcripts of the bachelor's degree
 - Copy of the last payslip (if applying for a scholarship and currently employed)

Steps to Apply for Individual Modules

1. Visit the website: <https://www.santannapisa.it/en/istanza-master/master-electoral-policy-administration>
2. Download the “**Individual Modules Application**” file and fill it out electronically.
3. Email the completed file to: mepa@santannapisa.it

FEES AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION

WHAT IS THE TUITION FEE FOR THE MASTER?

The tuition fee for the MA in Electoral Policy and Administration is 10,000 EUR.

- **Full Master:** €10,000, payable in three instalments (€3,500, €3,500, €3,000)
- **Individual Modules:** €700–€950 per module (depending on ECTS credits)
- **Discounts:** 10% for 2nd/3rd modules, 15% for 4th–6th modules
- **Fee reductions may apply for:** merit, LDC candidates, female candidates, and disability exemptions
- **Scholarship:** Jeff and Carolyn Fischer Scholarship – \$5,000 award for candidates engaged in electoral conflict prevention and security

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FEES AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION

WHAT IS THE TUITION FEE FOR THE INDIVIDUAL MODULES?

The fee for each MEPA module is determined by the number of credits assigned to it, which ranges from 2 to 4 depending on the complexity of the module. The fees are 700.00 euros for 2-credit modules, 850.00 euros for 3-credit modules, and 950.00 euros for 4-credit modules. Students who enrol in multiple modules receive a 10% discount on the fees for the second and third modules and a 15% discount on the fees for the fourth, fifth, and sixth modules. The order of the modules for calculating the reduction will consider the least expensive modules first, and the most expensive modules last to benefit the student.

ARE THERE ANY FEE REDUCTION OR DISCOUNTS AVAILABLE?

To promote diversity within the programme, the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies and its partners may offer partial fee reductions based on merit, distinctive competencies, and academic excellence to talented students who require financial aid. In each selection round, the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies and its partners may offer fee reductions of up to 30% to Master candidates from Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

Female candidates will have precedence in the case of ex aequo. Admitted candidates who require financial reductions may contact the programme director within one week of receiving their acceptance email. Fee reductions are subject to the availability of funds.

Pursuant to art. 9, paragraph 2 of Legislative Decree No. 68/2012 the Institution grants total exemption regarding payment of the enrolment fee in the case of students with disabilities, acknowledged to be equal to or greater than sixty-six percent, in accordance with art. 3, paragraph 1 of Law No. 104/1992, and applies a 1.5% reduction for every percentage point of disability in the case of students who have been acknowledged a disability of less than sixty-six percent. A student who asks for said exemption or reduction must attach an appropriate certificate to the online application.

Please go to the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna webpage to read more about the [Course Fees](#).

CAN I APPLY FOR A SCHOLARSHIP?

The Jeff and Carolyn Fischer Scholarship is also an annual scholarship award granted to one student per intake, which covers part of the tuition costs of the master programme. The award is \$5,000 and is given to a student who has been admitted to the MEPA programme and is professionally engaged or intends to be engaged in some aspect of electoral conflict prevention and electoral security. Applicants must submit a cover letter in English to Professor Jeff Fischer, explaining their engagement in electoral security, career path, and future professional plans. The scholarship applications are reviewed and awarded by Professor Fischer based on the applicant's background, professional intentions concerning electoral security, and future plans.

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CONTACT INFORMATION

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