Kelly Lamb Pollack represents many of the time-strapped professionals who enroll in the Public Policy Administration program at the University of Missouri—St. Louis. She was in a difficult situation with no apparent good alternatives.

As director of development for the Center of Creative Arts in University City, Mo., Pollack managed the nonprofit organization’s $10 million capital and endowment campaign and secured millions of dollars in grants. She was succeeding at a demanding job while wanting to pursue a master’s degree. Yet quitting her job and returning to school full-time was not an option.

The PPA program at UMSL offered a solution.

“[The program] was flexible in terms of allowing me to work full time at COCA and affordable enough that I could pay my own tuition,” says Pollack, who was promoted to executive director of CDCA earlier this year.

**Flexibility and rigor**

PPA is an independent and interdisciplinary program under the Graduate School with jointly appointed faculty from the College of Business Administration and several departments in the College of Arts and Sciences. PPA is largely composed of the Master of Public Policy Administration program, Nonprofit Management & Leadership program and the Local Government Partnership.

The MPPA was initiated in 1976 and offered its first degrees in 1977. The degree, which Pollack completed in 2003, prepares students for positions in public and nonprofit sectors or for-profit organizations that work with both.
The Nonprofit Management & Leadership program and Local Government Partnership are non-degree programs that offer graduate certificates and complement the MPPA.

In addition to general nonprofit education and training, Nonprofit Management & Leadership offers consulting for St. Louis-area organizations and professionals, custom training services and non-credit courses on fundraising and development.

The Local Government Partnership is a collaborative effort among the PPA program, Public Policy Research Center at UMSL, University of Missouri Extension and East-West Gateway Council of Governments. The partnership provides internships and opportunities to study the inner-workings of municipal governments.

PPA has recently experienced an uptick in popularity. The program now has more than 100 students, about 35 percent more than two years ago.

"Students are attracted to the program for a number of reasons," says Brady Baybeck, PPA director and associate professor of political science and public policy administration. "We really strive to provide students with an academically rigorous, yet convenient, program. It's that mix of flexibility and rigor that's so important."

Graduates from the PPA program go on to serve as policy analysts, human resource managers, city officials and nonprofit leaders.

Ellen Reed, MPPA 2008, was a veteran of the nonprofit sector before enrolling at UMSL. She says she never thought she would immerse herself in the MPPA program. "I was afraid I wasn't smart enough."

The Nonprofit Management & Leadership program is what initially drew Reed to the university. But within three weeks of starting her coursework, she was hooked on the broader PPA program and degree track.

"I applied to the MPPA program, quit my job and elected to attend school full time," she says.

Baybeck recalls Reed throwing herself into the program. He says she's a typical MPPA student in that she came to UMSL with a lot of experience and was originally attracted to one area of the PPA program only to discover she was interested in more.

"She wanted to expand her knowledge of running a nonprofit, but realized the power of analysis," Baybeck says. "Without planning it, she got into the data and policy research side."

Reed now serves as executive director of Lydia's House, a St. Louis nonprofit that provides transitional housing for abused women and their children.

A good fit

Unlike Pollack and Reed, John Shaw did not have a lot of experience in his future field prior to enrolling at UMSL. He taught middle school for a year, worked in financial sales another and considered pursuing a master's degree in clinical psychology at one point. He was employed as an academic adviser at UMSL when he began to explore the MPPA program.

"Terry Jones (professor of public policy administration and political science at UMSL) is the one who got me really interested in this," Shaw says. "He felt it would be a good fit. Sure enough, I ended up agreeing with him."

Shaw is now the city manager for Ferguson, Mo. Since he began running the day-to-day operations of the city, it's been named a "Hip 'Hood" by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and a 2010 All-America City Finalist by the National Civic League.

Shaw, MPPA 2003, now helps with the PPA program along with other area city managers as instructors in the Local Government Partnership, which gave him insight into city administration as a student.

"I'm extremely grateful for what PPA gave to me," Shaw says. "I definitely recommend the program for anyone who is interested in this line of work. It gives you a solid foundation that you can build from and, equally important, gives you exposure to professionals in the field."