Foundations of Public Administration
RPAD 709 – Fall 2015
Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, SUNY Albany
Department of Public Administration and Policy

Dr. Ellen V. Rubin

Class Information: Tuesdays 2:45 to 5:35
Draper 246
Office hours: Wednesdays 3:00-4:00 and by appointment

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Course Description and Learning Objectives

This seminar is a required course in the doctoral program in public administration and policy, and is the only required course devoted exclusively to the study of public administration. As a result, this course is designed to provide an intellectual history of public administration, and lay the foundations for understanding the contemporary study of the field. This exploration will include critical analysis of the claims, assumptions, definitions, and values underpinning these key ideas. Finally, this course is built on the assumption that every student pursuing doctoral studies in public administration, regardless of area of specialization, should be knowledgeable about the intellectual history of the field, including the ideas, theories, practices, and debates fundamental to the evolution of the field from its inception to the present.

Our approach will be primarily theoretical and conceptual, leaving more applied and practical aspects to other courses and seminars. Put another way, we will focus more on the changing concepts and theories that account for the changing practices in the public sector, as opposed to focusing on the changing practices of public administration.

Across the semester, we will frequently return to enduring tensions in the field: politics vs. administration, bureaucracy vs. democracy, efficiency vs. equity, control vs. discretion, democracy vs. efficiency, centralization vs. decentralization, neutrality vs. responsiveness, and distrust in government vs. an expectation that government will “fill the breach” – to name just a few.

Given all this, you should leave the course:
- With a critical appreciation for the development of key issues and ideas in public administration as they have evolved historically;
- Aware of the theory building on the key issues and ideas in the field;
- Able to understand and articulate the “classical” arguments underlying current research;
- Able to integrate classic debates and dilemmas with current research in the field;
- Alert to issues and ideas than can become “hooks” for your research; and
- Confident to ask questions at academic conferences linking current research to traditional dilemmas in the field.
The majority of the reading in this course approaches public administration from the context of American governmental traditions, especially in the first half of the semester. In selecting course readings I made a conscious effort to include perspectives on key topics from outside the U.S.. For some weeks, this means that one or two readings provide a non-U.S. perspective. In weeks later in the semester, a majority of readings are written by non-U.S. academics using cases from outside the U.S.. Public administration and political science scholars in other countries have robust academic literatures unique to each of their political traditions and administrative histories. Students wanting more comparative perspectives should seek out resources and syllabi on comparative public administration or seek out scholars writing and teaching in their countries of interest. If you find good pieces that I should consider adding to the course in future semesters, please share them with me. I am happy to add broader perspectives.

This class represents the beginning of your journey to developing a comprehensive understanding of public administration as an academic field. This course is a starting point to give you a broad overview of the field and directions for where to go for further knowledge. Doctoral students must also recognize that this class is presented from one point of view—as you begin to develop your own understanding of public administration, you should question (respectfully) my perspective on the field and explore where your understandings diverge or align with how public administration is presented in this class.

Text Books

Required books (5)


Recommended but not required


Students are responsible for downloading journal articles that are available electronically through the library. Additional readings will be made available through the course web page on Blackboard, which can be accessed through MyUAlbany.
Students are also strongly encouraged to join an academic professional organization that fits well with your academic interests. Most memberships with academic professional organizations come along with access to the organization's key academic journal. These organizations have discounted student membership rates, and member discounts for conferences. You should review abstracts in your key journals on a regular basis. Key organizations include, but are not limited to:

- American Society of Public Administration/ *Public Administration Review* (Note that ASPA has a number of sections specific to different subfields, many of which publish their own journals.)
- Public Management Research Association/ *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*
- Association of Public Policy and Management/ *Journal of Public Policy and Management*
- American Political Science Association/ *American Political Science Review* (Note that APSA has a number of sections specific to different subfields, including public administration and public policy sections. Many APSA sections have their own journals.)

**Communication**

Communication outside of scheduled class meetings and office hours will occur primarily over email. Students are expected to check their email every day. The best way to contact me outside of class is by email. Meetings outside of class and office hours should be scheduled by appointment. All class-related activities, including class and group discussions, emails and assignments should be conducted in business standard English.

**Grading**

Student performance in the course will be determined by four components:

- Two essays, 60% (see appendix I),
- Book review and presentation, 15% (see appendix II)
- Weekly commentaries, 15% (see appendix III), and
- Participation, 10% (see appendix IV).

*Attendance.* Attendance is required and necessary for your success in the course. Any student with 3 unexcused absences will lose 5% from their final grade. A student with more than 3 unexcused absences will have a notation placed on the transcript indicating you stopped attending class. The instructor reserves the right to drop you from the class if you have more than three absences. Absences will only be excused under certain circumstances, such as an unplanned health emergency, in case of religious observance, or for an authorized intercollegiate event. Documentation is required to have an absence excused.
Grading Scale.

- **A**: 93 percent and above
- **A-**: 90 to 92 percent
- **B+**: 87-89 percent
- **B**: 83-86 percent
- **B-**: 80-82 percent
- **C+**: 77-79 percent
- **C**: 73-76 percent
- **C-**: 70-72 percent
- **D+**: 67-69 percent
- **D**: 63-66 percent
- **D-**: 62-60 percent
- **E**: below 60 percent

**Grade Appeals.** Students may appeal a grade on a specific assignment within two weeks of the assignment being returned. To submit an appeal, the student should return the original graded assignment and a letter/memo outlining why you think the grade should be changed. Appeals must be submitted on paper, typed-written. In the appeal, students must identify 1) the specific issue you believe should be reconsidered and 2) evidence from assignment instructions, assigned readings, lectures, or other materials that would indicate your original submission is worthy of a higher grade. Be aware that your grade may go up, down, or remain the same as a result of your appeal.

**Academic Honesty.** Academic honesty is something your professor takes very seriously. Cheating in any form will not be tolerated. Students are required to be familiar with the university’s academic honesty policies; ignorance is not an excuse for dishonest behavior. In all cases of cheating, a Violation of Academic Integrity Report will be submitted to the Dean of Graduate Studies to be placed in your university file, with copies provided to you, the director of the PhD program, the department head, and the Dean of Rockefeller College. Additional penalties may include some combination of the following: revision and re-submission of the assignment, reduction of the grade or failure of the assignment, reduction of the course grade or failure of the course, filing of a case with the Office of Conflict Resolution and Civic Responsibility, suspension, or expulsion.

**Late Assignments.** An assignment is considered late if the paper copy is not submitted at the beginning of class, if the electronic file is not submitted before class, and/or if the electronic file is not readable. Essays and the book review (electronic or hard copy) submitted 10 minutes after the beginning of class will be considered late and will be automatically reduced by 10%. Assignments submitted one day after the due date will be automatically reduced by 20%; assignments submitted two days after the assigned date will be reduced by 30%, etc. Exceptions will be made for extreme health and family emergencies. It is better to submit assignments early rather than late, so please plan ahead if you know you will be missing or arriving late to a class session in which an essay or the book review is due.
Other Course Policies

- It is your instructor’s goal to conduct class in an environment that is welcoming to all perspectives. Please treat your fellow students with the respect you want to receive.
- Students with needs consistent with the Americans with Disability Act should inform the instructor during the first week of class so that reasonable accommodations can be made.
- This syllabus serves as a general outline. The instructor reserves the right to deviate from the plan if necessary. Students will be notified promptly of any modifications.
- Arrive to class on time. Arriving late is disruptive to both the instructor and your classmates.
- Turn off all cell phones, IPods/MP3 players, and anything that beeps and/or vibrates during class. If there is an emergency which requires you to leave your cell phone on during class, notify your instructor before class begins.

Topic Outline

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 1</td>
<td>Introduction to Course (no assigned reading)</td>
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<td>September 8</td>
<td>Foundations of American Public Administration</td>
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<td>September 15</td>
<td>Administrative Law and State Traditions</td>
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<td>September 22</td>
<td>No Class – University Closed for Yom Kippur</td>
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<td>September 29</td>
<td>Discretion and Politics (and/or/versus) Administration</td>
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<td>October 6</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
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<td>October 13</td>
<td>Bureaucratic Legitimacy</td>
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<td>October 20</td>
<td>Representative Bureaucracy</td>
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<td>October 27</td>
<td>An Economic Invasion</td>
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<td>November 3</td>
<td>New Public Management</td>
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<td>November 10</td>
<td>Governance</td>
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<td>November 17</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
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<td>November 24</td>
<td>No Class - Thanksgiving Week</td>
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<td>December 1</td>
<td>Performance Management</td>
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<td>December 8</td>
<td>What is Public Administration?</td>
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<td>December 15</td>
<td>Discussion of Book Reviews</td>
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Please contact Dr. Rubin directly for the reading list.
Appendix I: Essays

Essay 1: October 20 on representative bureaucracy
Essay 2: December 1 on performance

Overview. Well-trained doctoral students understand how current research agendas are connected to long-standing questions in the field of public administration. The topics of representative bureaucracy and performance are not long-standing dilemmas or enduring theoretical issues in the field of public administration, but they are 1) topics on which a large amount of research has been conducted in the last 30 years, and 2) based on core arguments and fundamental theories that we will be covering throughout the semester. The purpose of these essays is to provide an introduction to the current research on these topics, and then to push students to “connect the dots” between these topics and the bigger questions of the field. Making these connections requires a good understanding of the core dilemmas of the field, and analysis and integration across literatures. More detailed instructions on each essay will be distributed separately.

Grading. In general, submissions will be assessed according to 1) the degree to which the student answered the question in a sophisticated manner, 2) the degree to which the student critically integrates course concepts, and 3) overall organization and professionalism of the paper. Each essay will be weighted equally in calculating the grade at the end of the semester.

Submission of papers. Each essay is due at the beginning of class on the designated date. Electronic versions of the paper are to be submitted via the SafeAssign function in Blackboard before class. Paper copies are to be submitted at the beginning of class. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure the electronic file is readable and not corrupted. Please note: once you hit the submit button in SafeAssign, you cannot go back and submit a different version.

Citations. Include a bibliography. In-text citations and the bibliography should be formatted in APA style. Students are to cite sources in a manner consistent with academic honesty policies. I prefer you include too many citations rather than too few. As a general rule of thumb, provide a citation for something you did not know before you began your research. See the recommended APA Handbook for assistance in using APA style or other on-line resources such as:
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/
http://www.library.cornell.edu/resrch/citmanage/apa

Formatting. The length of each assignment will be specified when the details are distributed separately. Each paper should begin with a 200-word informational abstract summarizing the major points of your argument and your conclusion.
Appendix II: Book Review

October 13: Proposal due to Blackboard
December 15: Reviews due and discussed in class

Overview: Some public administration seminars are organized around the “great books” of the field. I chose to organize this course instead around the key theoretical questions and debates in the field. The assigned reading for the course only includes a few of the “great books.” This assignment is designed to expose you to some of these texts. By the end of the course, you should be able to better understand the significance of the arguments in these books and place them within the larger dilemmas of the field.

In this assignment, every student will read two of these books. Students will be provided a list of books to choose from, organized according to the topics we will cover over the course of the semester. The two books selected should be on the same topic. Students will write an integrated book review, similar to a book review you might see in one of the academic journals. As a junior academic, writing the occasional book review is a way to develop good relationships with journal editors, get yourself known to your colleagues, and read new books that look interesting and appear relevant to your research interests.

Proposals for the book review are due on October 13 and should be submitted to Blackboard. I will provide feedback on the books selected and any questions.

Each student will verbally present a summary of their book review to the class on December 15.

More detailed instructions on the assignment will be distributed separately.
Appendix III: Weekly Reading Commentaries

A successful seminar requires wide participation. Each member of the seminar has a responsibility to contribute to the scholarly exchange during class sessions. As a result, it is expected that all participants will complete readings on schedule and be prepared to regularly comment on, analyze, and critique the assigned readings.

There are three primary purposes for the commentaries: 1) to hold students accountable for completing the assigned reading, 2) to begin the process of analyzing and critiquing the readings, and 3) to provide information to your instructor which will influence the content of class discussions. Weekly commentaries constitute 15% of the student’s semester grade.

Students are required to submit a commentary and two questions for class discussion each week. Together, the commentary and two discussion questions should be no longer than one single-spaced page of text total. Do not engage in funny formatting to squeeze in more text; margins should be at least one inch all around the page and use 12-point font to ensure read-ability.

Comments can focus on something you find interesting, surprising, disagree with, etc. Importantly, the commentaries should not be summaries of the reading. Instead they should reflect your thoughts, analysis, and critiques of the week’s readings. You can also feel free to identify concepts that are confusing and describe why you are stuck. Obviously, in one page you cannot analyze or critique every assigned reading in a particular week. Instead, pick a few key pieces or ideas that spark your interest. Warning: focusing exclusively on one piece in a commentary will make me wonder if you did any of the rest of the reading. Integrate ideas/debates from multiple selections.

The two discussion questions should be designed to generate conversations or debates in class. If you were in charge of organizing the seminar for the week, what are two big questions you think the class should tackle? Proved a few sentences with each question explaining why you think these are worth discussing in class.

Expectations for citations in the commentaries are more relaxed than for essays. If you provide a quotation from material assigned in this class, you need to provide the author, date and page number and you should use quotation marks. A full citation at the end of the commentary is not needed. However if you refer to material from outside of class a full citation is required.

Submission. Commentaries are due the day before class. They are to be submitted no later than 3:00pm the Monday before class through Blackboard, in electronic form only. There are 12 weeks of assigned reading. Commentaries are not needed when the two essays are due on October 20 (representative bureaucracy) and December 1 (performance). Of the 10 remaining weeks of assigned reading, students are expected to submit commentaries for 9 of the 10 weeks. Late submissions of commentaries will not be accepted, except in extreme cases of a health or family emergency.
Appendix IV: Participation

A successful seminar requires wide participation. Each member of the seminar has a responsibility to contribute to the scholarly exchange during class sessions. As a result, it is expected that all participants will complete readings on schedule and be prepared to regularly comment on, analyze, and critique the readings. Participation in the course constitutes 10% of the student’s semester grade.

According to Martha Maznevski (1996) at the University of Virginia,¹ the ultimate goal of class participation is for students to learn from each other:

Active involvement in learning increases what is remembered, how well it is assimilated, and how the learning is used in new situations. In making statements to peers about their own thoughts on a class topic, students must articulate those thoughts and also submit them to examination by others. In listening to their peers, students hear many different ways of interpreting and applying class material, and thus are able to integrate many examples of how to use the information (p. 1).

According to Professor Jerome Ziegler (1996):

In seminar, there is no “bad” idea, no “dumb” question or expression of opinion. Your idea or question may not be logical, that is well connected to the object of inquiry, it may not stand the test of reason, it may not be well grounded in the facts. Therefore it may not be correct, that is it may not be in accord with logic or reality. But none of this means that the person holding the idea or asking the question is somehow stupid and should not have asked the question or expressed the idea or opinion.

Your idea may be wrong. It may even be foolish. If either or both, it will be replaced by a better idea as the discussion proceeds. You may not know where your idea will take you. You may wish to test it, to ask questions without knowing their full import, to entertain an idea or an opinion without fully believing it.

Each member of this seminar must take responsibility for making it work as an important learning experience. Each of you must participate by careful reading of the material, by joining your colleagues in the small group exercises and by giving the question or reading under discussion your best thinking. Together we will build an edifice of learning that will take us, I hope, to a new plateau of understanding.

Appendix V: Reading as a Doctoral Student

Given the amount of reading assigned in this course, I do not expect you to memorize the nuance of every argument of every article and book chapter assigned. Instead, I expect you to understand the overall argument being made by authors, and I expect you to critically analyze those arguments.

What do I mean by critical analysis? In order to engage in critical analysis, you must first understand the core argument of the piece. Once you understand the core argument, you can then begin to evaluate its efficacy. As you read, instead of trying to memorize what the authors say, consider the following questions:
1. What is the purpose behind the book or article?
2. What is the question being asked by the author, or what is the problem they are considering?
3. What are the key theories guiding the author?
4. What is the key conclusion, finding, or recommendation of the author?
5. What are the assumptions of the author? What are the strengths and weaknesses of these assumptions?
6. What data, information, or evidence does the author use to support the argument? What are the strengths and weaknesses of that evidence?
7. What are the implications or consequences of the author’s key conclusions, findings, or recommendation?
8. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this perspective?
9. How does this perspective relate or compare to other authors/arguments we have covered in the course?

When reading for this course, you should always be able to answer questions 1-4 for every piece. You should be able to answer at least two of the remaining questions for every piece. Consider using questions 5-9 as tools for framing your weekly commentaries and discussion questions. Generally, answering these questions may require changing how you take notes while you read. Reading for understanding the key arguments might actually make your reading faster.
Appendix VI: Acknowledgements

It takes a village to write a syllabus for a PhD seminar. In developing this course, I consulted with many colleagues within UAlbany and across my public administration network. Brainstorming sessions, readings lists, and syllabi from my colleagues helped me to narrow the scope of the course and design the assignments. In some cases, I have taken reading material or blocks of text from course syllabi. Some of these individuals provided advice directly. Some material I gathered from syllabi posted online or from syllabi that were passed to me second- or third-hand. Any mistakes, omissions, or misinterpretations are my own and not the fault of these folks. I wish to recognize the contributions of the following individuals:

In SUNY Albany: Judith Saidel, Mitch Abolafia, David McCaffrey, Jeff Straussman, Erzsebet Fazekas, Stephen Weinberg, David Matkin, and Elizabeth Bough-Martin. I also want to thank the students who provided extensive feedback on the readings and course design the first time I taught this course in the spring of 2014.

In other institutions: Larry O’Toole, University of Georgia; H. George Frederickson, University of Kansas; Norma Riccucci, Rutgers University; Bob Durant, American University; Alisdair Roberts, University of Missouri; Jessica Sowa, University of Colorado; B. Guy Adams, University of Missouri; Tamar Hafner, American University; and Keith Baker, Oregon State University.

I additionally consulted materials from the American Society of Public Administration and the Public Administration Review, posted as part of the Foundations of Public Administration series, available online at:

In particular, I considered the following model syllabi: Public Administration History, provided by Jos Raadschelders; Administrative Law, provided by David Rosenbloom and Helena Rene; Comparative Public Administration, provided by James Bjorkman; Governance, provided by Larry Lynn; and Theory and Scope of Public Administration, provided by Mark Rutgers.