THEORY AND RESEARCH ON NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS AND THE NONPROFIT SECTOR¹
RPAD 720 - FALL 2017

Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, University at Albany
Department of Public Administration and Policy

Professor Jennifer E. Dodge

Class Location: Husted Hall 013
Class Time: Wednesday 5:45-9:25pm
Office Hours: Wednesday 2:00-3:00 pm and by appointment
Office location: Milne Hall 308
Email: jdodge@albany.edu
Office phone: 442-5274

Course Description
This course is required for the sub-concentration of Nonprofit Management and Policy in the Public Management Concentration in the Public Management and Policy Ph.D. program. As such, it provides an overview of the diverse theoretical perspectives – and related empirical research – that have been applied to nonprofit organizations and the nonprofit sector. Drawing on foundational economic, sociological, political science and inter-disciplinary theories and frameworks, the course offers a “map” of the field to doctoral level students to help them prepare for academic careers in nonprofit studies within public administration and related fields. Specifically, we will examine the theoretical assumptions, claims, values and definitions of the various perspectives in the field and how they compare with each other. We will also assess the limits, advantages, and usefulness of these approaches for answering specific research questions about nonprofit organizations and the nonprofit sector.

This course will be run as a seminar. This means that students will be expected to come to class prepared to discuss and critique the readings. Course assignments will, in part, help students to prepare for active engagement.

Course objectives: By the end of the course, students should be able to:
1. Distinguish the central theoretical perspectives that have been used to understand nonprofit organizational behavior and nonprofit sector dynamics
2. Identify and assess the different assumptions and analytical approaches of the central theoretical perspectives that have been used to understand nonprofit organizational behavior and nonprofit sector dynamics, and how they influence research findings
3. Develop in-depth knowledge of one of the theoretical perspectives covered in the course
4. Assess empirical research in one substantive area in the nonprofit field for its quality and significance
5. Assess the development of competing theoretical perspective used to understand a particular question about nonprofit organizations

These objectives are meant to prepare you to meet the field requirements in the public management concentration, particularly regarding the completion of a literature review for candidacy, and to develop skills related to becoming a nonprofit scholar.

¹ This course was first conceived by Judith Saidel, Associate Professor Emerita, University at Albany, and incorporates her thinking on what should be included in such a syllabus. I received input from Elizabeth Searing and Jeff Straussman, and borrowed ideas from doctoral-level courses from Ellen Rubin and Mitch Abolafia. I also consulted Amy Gould’s syllabus on Public Administration on the Edge for ideas on critical theory.
I encourage you to join an academic professional organization that fits your academic interests. Most memberships for these organizations provide access to the organization’s academic journal, discounted student membership rates, and member discounts for conferences. You should review abstracts in your key journals on a regular basis. Key organizations in the nonprofit field include, but are not limited to:

- **ARNOVA** (Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action) – affiliated journal *NVSQ* (Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly)
- **ISTR** (International Society for Third-Sector Research) – affiliated journal *Voluntas*
- Main public administration associations you learned about in RPAD 709 (e.g., **ASPA**, **PMRA**, **APPAM**, **APSA**)

**Text Books:** You may purchase required books online. Some used books may be available at Mary Jane books at 522 Washington Avenue.

**Required reading:**

**Scholarship:**

**Research practice:**

**Recommended further reading:**
- Ott, J.S. & Dicke, L.A. (Eds.) with Meyer, C.K. (2016). Understanding nonprofit organizations: Governance, leadership, and Management, 3rd Edition. Oxford: Westview Press. (This book is an edited volume that includes sections on major topics in empirical research in nonprofit organizations including: governance, leadership, strategic planning, fundraising, entrepreneurship, managing contracts, financial management, managing volunteers, accountability and evaluation, and organizing internationally. There are two earlier editions which are useful in their own right because they covers topics that were timely at the date the book was published.)
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: Sage Publications. (This book is very useful for gaining an understanding of major theoretical perspectives that have informed research in the social science and nonprofit studies.)
- See several other books on specific topics throughout the syllabus.

Additional readings will be posted on Blackboard at [https://blackboard.albany.edu/](https://blackboard.albany.edu/). Use the same login and password required for MyUAlbany.
**Assignments**

Your understanding of the course material will be assessed through several assignments. Given that this course is a seminar and not a lecture, students will have responsibilities for high levels of participation and engagement, and for presenting class materials. Students are expected to come to class fully prepared to discuss all of the assigned course readings. NOTE:

- *I grade all submitted assignments electronically. Please submit assignments in word format (not pdf) so I can type notes in the margins and make editing suggestions in track changes. Be sure to check blackboard for my feedback and comments. I will expect you to take into account my feedback in subsequent assignments.*

**Lead class discussion** – Students are required to lead two class discussions during the course of the semester. The discussion leader will prepare a summary of the articles from the week to hand out to the class and a cover sheet with 5-10 critical questions designed to probe the material and generate inquiry (across the articles). Good questions are those that probe the basic assumptions underlying the different articles, assess their strengths and weaknesses for answering questions in the field, and “connect the dots” between the week’s readings and broader questions in the field. (See Appendix A: Reading Critically for some tips on how to engage the readings effectively.) The outline of the individual articles should include each article’s main “punch line” and its main theoretical and empirical points, and should be no longer than 1 page per reading. During the class session, the student will present the 5-10 critical questions and use them to facilitate discussion.

- Submit summaries electronically on blackboard by 11:59pm on the day before the designated class. I will not accept late summaries.
- Write all summaries in complete sentences, single-spaced, with one-inch margins, Times New Roman 12 point font, and number the pages.
- Use proper in-text citations (quotation marks, page numbers, references, etc.), but only include a bibliography if you refer to readings outside of the course.

**Weekly Commentaries** – Students are required to submit a weekly commentary for 10 out of 14 classes throughout the semester. You may choose which weeks you complete the commentaries. The purposes for the commentaries are to prepare you to participate fully in class discussion and to provide information to the instructor about your questions and insights so I can prepare to respond to them in the discussion. Your commentaries should focus on questions or insights you have across the readings, such as something you find interesting or surprising, or that you disagree with. Do not summarize the readings, but focus on your reactions to the week’s readings. (Do not include in your review the readings under “Research practice;” these will be used mostly in class exercises to help prepare you to complete your assignments.) Strong commentaries will identify and critique underlying assumptions of the readings, and their usefulness for advancing the field of nonprofit studies (including unanswered research questions that you find interesting). You can also identify concepts that are confusing and describe why you are stuck. You need not analyze or critique every reading, but must go beyond one reading to demonstrate your understanding of the relationship among the articles in any week. You may also connect the readings in one week to ideas from other articles in the course or in the field. The commentaries should be no longer than 1 page, single-spaced.

- Submit commentaries electronically on blackboard by 11:59pm on the day before the designated class. I will not accept late commentaries.
- Write all commentaries in complete sentences, single-spaced, with one-inch margins, Times New Roman 12 point font, and number the pages.
- Use proper in-text citations (quotation marks, page numbers, references, etc.), but only include a bibliography if you refer to readings outside of the course.
**Literature reviews** – Students are required to write a literature review that assesses how well three different literatures in the nonprofit field address a specific research question. Students will identify an answerable research question and three competing theoretical perspectives that have the potential to shed light on this question, both in consultation with the professor. Students will then write three “short literature reviews,” each of which will review one of the identified theoretical perspectives (including theoretical and empirical articles). These short assignments will prepare students to write their final literature review, which will compare and contrast the competing perspectives and take a position on which one is best suited to answer the identified research question. (The research question may evolve over the course of the semester.) Students will be required to respond to feedback on the short literature reviews in the final literature review.

The purpose of the literature review is to distinguish several theoretical perspectives used to understanding nonprofit behavior, identify their assumptions and analytical approaches, and assess their usefulness to advancing your particular research questions and the field of nonprofit studies. Students may also use these assignments to advance work on their candidacy requirements and dissertation prospectus, or to prepare a paper to submit to the ARNOVA conference.

To successfully complete the literature review, you must conduct additional research beyond the assigned course readings. This will require a substantial amount of research outside of class so be sure to work into your schedule time to do this research. Do *not* collect and analyze empirical data for this assignment. You are not allowed to submit the same paper from another class to fulfill the requirements of this assignment.

- Submit literature reviews electronically on blackboard by 11:59pm on the designated date.
- Write all literature reviews in complete sentences and paragraphs, double-spaced, with one-inch margins, Times New Roman 12 point font, and number the pages. Do not use cover pages. *I will return essays that do not meet these guidelines to be rewritten, and the late penalty will apply (see grading).*
- You may provide tables and figures; place them at the end of the paper. Bibliographies, tables and figures do not count towards page length.
- All references should be cited in APA style and included in a bibliography. Formatting instructions can be found at [http://library.albany.edu/cfox](http://library.albany.edu/cfox).
- See **Appendix B: Acceptable Sources** for some tips on where to begin your search.

### Assignment due dates

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lead class discussion &amp; summary</td>
<td>Day before assigned class 11:59pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly commentaries</td>
<td>Day before selected class 11:59pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short lit review 1</td>
<td>Sunday, September 24, 11:59pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short lit review 2</td>
<td>Sunday, October 22, 11:59pm</td>
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<td>Short lit review 3</td>
<td>Sunday, November 19, 11:59pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final lit review</td>
<td>Sunday, December 17, 11:59pm</td>
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Grading

Student performance in the course will be determined as follows:

- Lead class discussion: 20% (10% x 2)
- Weekly commentaries: 20% (2% x 10)
- Short literature reviews: 30% (10% x 3)
- Final literature review: 30%

Late assignments - For every 24-hour period that an assignment is late, the grade will be reduced by 10%. The first 24-hour period begins on midnight the day the assignment is due.

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. 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

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92.99</td>
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<td>A:</td>
<td>87-89.99</td>
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<td>B:</td>
<td>83-86.99</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>80-82.99</td>
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<td>B:</td>
<td>77-79.99</td>
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<td>C:</td>
<td>73-76.99</td>
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<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72.99</td>
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<td>D:</td>
<td>63-66.99</td>
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<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69.99</td>
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<td>E:</td>
<td>below 60</td>
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Grading Criteria

Lead class discussion and summary – I will assess the summary and facilitation of the discussion based on 1) how well the discussion questions facilitate discussion of underlying assumptions of (different) research perspectives, and their strengthens and weaknesses for answering questions in the field, 2) how well the discussion questions link the day’s readings with broader trends or debates in the literature, 3) how well the written summaries of the articles captures the punch line and the main theoretical and empirical points of each article, and 4) the clarity of the writing.

Weekly commentaries – I will assess weekly commentaries based on 1) how thoughtfully you engage the reading (for example, by identifying and comparing underlying assumptions of the readings, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the different theoretical and methodological approaches, connecting the readings to trends or debates in the field, or raising questions that either intrigue or confuse you, among other things), 2) the clarity of the writing. These may be assessed not only through your written work, but also you effort to bring you commentaries into the class discussion.

Literature reviews (drafts and final) – Your literature reviews will be evaluated based on how well you 1) identify a clear and answerable research question and how well the literature answers it, 2) describe and critique central arguments, assumptions, claims, definitions, and values of the different research approaches, 3) review the empirical literature, 4) organize the paper and write clearly, and 5) follow the formatting and citation guidelines. A rubric will be handed out in class and posted on blackboard.
Communication - Students are invited to ask questions in class, during office hours, or via email. The best way to contact me outside of class is by email. I will usually respond to emails within 24 hours. If you send an email after 6pm, I may not response until the following day. Please check your email regularly for emails from me as well.

Other policies

   Academic Integrity - As members of the SUNY community, we are all expected to adhere to high standards of intellectual and academic integrity. You can view our Academic Code at: http://www.albany.edu/content_images/AcademicIntegrity.pdf. Violations of these standards will result in one of the following penalties or some variant: 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. In all cases, 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 department head, and the Dean of Rockefeller College.

   • 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.
**Course Schedule**

**UNIT ONE: INTRODUCTION**

**Class 1 (August 30): Origins and meaning of civil society and the nonprofit sector**
- Edwards, M. (2014). Chapter 2: Civil society as associational life. In *Civil Society.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. (Chapter 3: Civil society as the good society, and Chapter 4: Civil society as the public sphere are also useful for clarifying use of the term “civil society”.)

**Research practice: on doing literature reviews**

**Recommended additional reading:**
- Abzug, R. (1999). The nonprofit sector and the informal sector: A theoretical perspective. *Voluntas,* 10(2), 131-149. (This article provides a good counterpoint to the “distinct sectors” thesis espoused by Frumkin and others.)
- Srinivas, N. (2009). Against NGOs?: A critical perspective on nongovernmental action. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly,* 38(4), 615-626. (This article also critiques the “distinct sectors” thesis, but takes a critical view and points out that defining what belongs to what sector is a political act that has consequences for knowledge, power, and ethics.)
- Keane, J. (1988). *Civil society and the state: New European perspectives.* Verso Books. (Keane has written several books on civil society; this was one of his first.)
Class 2 (September 6): Nonprofits and public governance


Recommended additional reading:

Public governance:

Nonprofit accountability (in the hollow state):
- Articles in NVSQ symposium: Accountability and performance measurement: The Evolving role of nonprofits in the hollow state.
UNIT TWO: DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS & SECTORS

Class 3 (September 13): Economic theories


Recommended further reading:

- Chasse, J.D. (1995). Nonprofit organizations and the institutional approach. Journal of Economic Issues, 29(2), 525-533. (This article takes on the “old institutionalism” approach from an economic perspective, provides a review of literature to date, and provides a critique and extension.)

*** September 20 – No class – Rosh Hashanah ***

*** Short lit review 1 due - Sunday, September 24, 11:59pm ***
Class 4 (September 27): Political theories


Research practice: Designing research questions and problems


Recommended further reading:


Democracy, associations, and civic engagement:


Feminist organizations from a political science perspective:


Deliberative democracy/public sphere and associations:

- Fischer, Frank. (2006). Participatory governance as deliberative empowerment: The cultural politics


Class 5 (October 4): Sociological and organizational theories

*Institutional theory (and integrated theories)*:


*Resource dependency theory*:


*Note:* There are many sociological theories that could be applied to nonprofit organizations and other organizations in the “third sector”. I have included as required reading some of the most influential in the nonprofit literature. Others might include practice theory (see the Eliasoph reading below), field theory and its variants (see the Barman and Marwell readings below as well as work by Jodi Sandfort and colleagues), and many others that are also related with organization theory (organizational ecology, etc.). There are also important concepts from sociology such as “mediating structures” (see the Berger & Neuhaus, and Couto, readings below.) We are only touch the tip of the iceberg here so keep reading!

*Recommended additional reading*:


Resource dependency (and an extension):

Organizational ecology:

Class 6 (October 11): Legal perspectives and regulation (You may not choose this week to lead class discussion.)
NOTE: The first two readings give overviews of the range of legal dimensions of nonprofit organizations. Do not try to absorb everything in these readings. Focus on gaining a general sense of the terrain of the legal system in the US with respect to nonprofits, and how the legal system constrains and enables free speech and political action, and makes public-private distinctions that have consequences. The remaining required readings offer empirical analysis on specific issues.

Recommended additional reading:

Fremont-Smith, M. R. (2009). *Governing nonprofit organizations: Federal and state law and regulation.* Harvard University Press. (This is an excellent and comprehensive reference!)

**Tax code and taxation:**


**Self-regulation and accountability:**


More on the Filer and Peterson Commissions:


Class 7 (October 18): Critical theory and nonprofit studies


**Recommended future reading:**

*Empirical, various topics:*

*Theory:*

*** Short lit review 2 due - Sunday, October 22, 11:59pm ***
UNIT THREE: SUBSTANTIVE AREAS OF RESEARCH IN NONPROFIT STUDIES

Class 8 (October 25): Nonprofit-government relationships


Note: In some ways, the articles on advocacy next week are an extension of the discussion this week. The nonprofit-government relations literature tends to focus on service-providing nonprofits and contracting as an avenue through which they relate to and potentially influence government. The advocacy literature tends to focus on organizations that do advocacy or community organizing, and that use more confrontational avenues of influence (e.g., protests and legal action).

Research practice:

- Example of defining puzzles, problems, and knowledge gaps from Dodge’s fracking project.

Recommended additional reading:


Nonprofits and the welfare state:


Nonprofits and voice in the political process:

Class 9 (November 1): Nonprofits and policy advocacy


Note: Jenkins gives an overview of research on nonprofit advocacy. De Graauw and Li et al. provide specific examples of advocacy, respectively in the US and China contexts. Skocpol, Walker and Strolovitch each talk about different challenges of advocacy in contemporary society. We do not have the space to cover the range of tactics and strategies that are often the focus of research on nonprofit advocacy. Some of the readings below will take you in this direction if you want to go there: the Pekkanen et al (2014) and Prakash & Gugerty (2010) books both provide good chapters on these topics, from within the nonprofit studies field.

Recommended additional reading:


Service providing nonprofits as advocates:

• See Mosley and Sandfort chapters in Pekkanen et al (2014) above.

**Interest groups and (unequal) representation:**


**Class 10 (November 8): Social movements and social change**


**Social movements around and across the world:**


**Note:** A distinction needs to be made that is not reflected in the required readings this week between progressive movements (e.g., for economic justice and environment protection) and conservative organizing (e.g., tea party). In addition, there can be “bad” social movements in the same way there is “bad civil society.” The movement for white supremacy that is surfacing in the US is an example of a “bad” social movement, as it advocates for the supremacy of one ethnic group over others, a fundamentally exclusionary rather than inclusionary project, not to mention its emphasis on violence rather than tolerance, and so on. As with other classes in this course, we are only scratching the surface!

**Recommended further reading:**

• Brilliant, E. L. (2000). Women’s gain: fund-raising and fund allocation as an evolving social


Social movements and framing:

Community organizing:

Social movements around and across the world:

Right-wing movements:
Class 11 (November 15): Social entrepreneurship & nonprofit finance (Note: ARNOVA is this week)


**Recommended further reading:**

- See Elizabeth Searing’s “Directed Readings: Theoretical Foundations of Nonprofit Finance” (to be handed out in class).

*** Short lit review 3 due - Sunday, November 19, 11:59pm ***

*** November 22 – No class – Thanksgiving ***
Class 12 (November 29): Collaboration


**Research practice: making claims... and making claims interesting**

- Revisit: Booth, W.C., Colomb, G.G. & Williams, J.M. (2005). Chapter 3: From topics to questions and Chapter 4: From questions to a problem. In *The craft of research: 3rd Edition.* (pp. 35-67). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. (Reread these chapters and rethink the significance of your questions (and ultimately the answers) that are the focus of your literature review.)

**Recommended further reading:**


**Networks:**


**Collaborative governance:**


Class 13 (December 6): Nonprofits in comparative perspectives

Recommended further reading:
Comparative perspectives:

Non-governmental organizations across the globe:

Global civil society:
• Taylor, R. (2002). Interpreting global civil society. Voluntas, 13(4), 339-347. (Is in debate with Rootes about whether NGOs make states irrelevant. There are good references in this article citing the debate in the field, e.g., Cohen & Rai 2000; Stiglitz 2002, Edwards & Gaventa 2001; Florini 2000, Keck & Sikink 1998. Some of these are focused on global social movements.)

Class 14 (December 13): Wrapping up and pulling it all together.
• Come prepared to discuss your literature review and what you’ve learned about nonprofits.

*** Final lit review due - Sunday, December 17, 11:59pm ***
Appendix A: Reading Critically

Critical reading means understanding the core argument of an article and assessing its quality in ways that are particular to social science research. As you read, actively engage in critical questions such as the following:

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 s/he is considering? (The rest of the critique is largely about assessing whether or not this question is answered in a satisfactory way.)
3. What are the key theories guiding the author?
4. What are the assumptions of these theories? What are the strengths and weaknesses of these assumptions?
5. Does the author apply the assumptions well or misunderstand the theory? Is there a fit between the research questions and the theory?
6. What is the key conclusion, finding, or recommendation of the author?
7. What data, information, or evidence does the author use to support the argument? What are the strengths and weaknesses of that evidence?
8. What are the implications or consequences of the author’s key conclusions, findings, or recommendation? Does the author understand these or not?
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 B: Acceptable Sources

Since you will be doing a literature review in this course, you will mostly use “secondary sources.” Primary sources directly reflect experience and include, but are not limited to, nonprofit reports, legislative hearings and testimonies, court decisions, and government auditor reports. Secondary sources are summaries and interpretations of primary sources. Secondary sources include, but are not limited to, academic articles, articles from major newspapers and news magazines, network and cable news programs, and so on. Blogs and Wikipedia are not acceptable sources. Be an intelligent consumer of information by evaluating secondary sources for potential political bias.

Here are some places to start with your research, but feel free to consult other sources:

- **Nonprofit journals:** Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly; Voluntas; Nonprofit Management and Leadership...
- **Public administration journals:** Public Administration Review, Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, American Review of Public Administration, Administration and Society, Administrative Theory & Praxis...
- **Public policy journals:** Policy Sciences, Policy & Society, Policy Studies Journal, Journal of Public Policy Analysis and Management, Critical Policy Studies...
- **Political science journals:** American Political Science Review, American Journal of Political Science, and Journal of Politics...
- **Sociological journals:** Social Problems, Social Movements...
- **Organizational theory journals:** Organization Studies, Human Relations...

Cathy Dwyer is our librarian at the Dewey Library. Definitely consult with her if you need some tips on getting started and on using the library resources. (The library will order books from uptown to be delivered, and will copy chapters for you too!)