

The University of North Carolina Wilmington  
 Master of Public Administration Program  
 Spring, 2008

**PLS 510: INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC AFFAIRS: POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

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Office Hours: Tuesday & Wednesday: 5:00 – 6:00 p.m.  
 Tuesday & Thursday 2:30 – 3:30 or by appointment

Class Hours: Tuesday 6:30 – 9:15 LH 111

**Course Description:**

Covers the rationales for public policy and critical concepts in public economics. It also covers the public policy process and the legal and political foundations of public administration. Finally the basics of national, state and local politics in the U.S. are highlighted. Particular emphasis is placed on decision-making, bounded rationality, and incrementalism in American Politics and their impact on public administration and public policy.

**Course Goals:**

- To acquire knowledge of how social, political and economic institutions and processes operate in U.S.
- To understand how political values shape the organization of public organizations.
- To examine the development and implementation of public policy and programs.
- To develop the students' ability to analyze how public organizations relate to their external political and economic environments.

**Course Grades:**

- *Weekly Written Assignments.....50%*
- *Final Exam....40%.*
- *Class participation.....10%*

**Required Books :**

Jeffrey Cohen (2000). Politics and Economic Policy in the U.S. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Don Kettl and James Fesler (2005). The Politics of the Administrative Process, third edition. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press. And the cases at the end of the book which will be used in class exercises so bring book to class.

John Kingdon (2003). Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies, Second Edition. New York: Longman.

### **Class Schedule and Assignments:**

***January 15***

Universal Definitions of Politics and Administration

Major Political, Economic, and Social Trends

Political Decentralization

Suburbanization and Sprawl

Income Distribution and Poverty

***Read: Kettl, Chap. 1***

***January 22***

Rationales for Public Policy Intervention

Market Failures

Public Goods

Externalities and the Tragedy of the Commons

Monopolies

Information Asymmetries

Merit Goods

***Read: Cohen, Chap. 1- 4.***

***Assignment: Surf the Internet and newspaper/magazine stories for summaries of important trends in the last year. Bring to class a one-page memo identifying 5 of the most important trends over the last year. Indicate in a short paragraph why each trend was critical for the country.***

***January 29***

Political Rationality vs. Economic Rationality

Public Choice Theory

Analysis of Policy Arenas:

Distributive Policy

Regulatory Policy

Re-distributive Policy

Self-Regulation Policy

**Read:** Cohen, Chap. 10, 11, 12.

**Assignment:** Using the major economic rationales for economic intervention in the marketplace, indicate the principal rationales for a community to use public funds to build a recreational park. Use bullet format. One page. Now identify the major economic rationales for adopting a heavily government subsidized prescription drug program at the national level. One page.

**February 5**

Monetary and Fiscal Policy  
Politics and Budgeting  
Revenue and Taxation

**Read** Cohen, Chap. 6, 7, 8, 9; Kettl, chapters 2, 10.

**Assignment:** Take each of the four policy arenas discussed (distributive, regulatory, redistribution, and self regulation). Using the library and Internet resources, pick one policy/program for each arena and identify the major stakeholders (about 5) involved in directly shaping that policy/program. Be specific with stakeholders including individuals if appropriate, interest or advocacy groups, bureaucratic units, etc. Include supporters and those in opposition. Three page limit.

**February 12**

Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations  
Public Interest Groups  
Un-funded Mandates

**Read:** Kettl, Chap. 3, 4, 5, 6, 11.

**Assignment:** Search the Internet on PIGS (public interest groups). Pick one of the groups and develop a two page handout on that public interest group which includes its mission, major activities, budget and staff, and latest legislative program or priority. Make a five minute power point presentation on your group.

**February 19**

Politics and Administration  
Planning and Organizing  
Implementation and Evaluation  
Principle Agent Theory

***Read: Kettl, Chap. 12, 13.***

***Assignment: Prepare a two page handout on a single federal or state agency of your choice and summarize the agency including how many employees, latest annual budget, major areas of responsibility or activity (mission), major legislative programs being implemented, and controversial issues in the last few years. Reference librarians can help you with sources. For a single federal agency, pick something below the entire Department. For example, do not take the Justice Department but select within the Department, an agency like the Criminal or the Civil Rights unit. Check organization chart for Department you are interested in. Five minute power point presentation on federal agency.***

**February 26**

Leadership  
Human Resource Management  
Political Appointees vs. Career Bureaucrats  
Factors affecting the selection of political appointees

***Read: Kettl, Chapters 7, 8.***

***Assignment: Using the library and Internet construct a profile of the leadership and management characteristics of three leading contenders for the Presidency from each party. Be sure to indicate their experience as a starting point. Focus on characteristics that would be important to you as a public administrator in an Executive Branch agency. Put information into a table that compares the six candidates. Five minute power point presentation on similarities or differences.***

**March 4**

***No Class...Spring Break***

**March 11**

Decision Making and Bounded Rationality  
Incrementalism  
Issue Networks

***Read: Kettl, Chap. 9; Kingdon, Chap. 1-4.***

**Assignment:** *Pick one specific issue network like health policy, immigration policy, social security policy, international terrorism, transportation policy, etc. and using Congressional Hearings, news accounts, web-sites, etc identify the major interest groups and individuals who are speaking out on the issues both pro and con. Limit yourself to the top 20 people or groups. Do a five minute power point presentation.*

**March 18**

Agenda Setting  
The Policy Process  
Policy Windows

**Read** *Kingdon, Chap. 5-10.*

**Assignment:** *In two pages, indicate what major changes you see taking place in the next year in the war in Iraq. Give your rationale and reasons. For example, do you anticipate more of the same and if so, why? If you anticipate major policy changes, what they may be and why? Take either position.*

**March 25**

Local Politics  
Community Power Structures  
Elitism  
Pluralism  
Professional City Management (major components)

**Read:** *Handout provided in class.*

**Assignment:** *Select one article from a professional journal on local politics and decision-making and summarize the main points in one page, bullet style. Look especially for basic principles or norms of local politics—i.e., economic elites always get their way unless there is a major realigning election and/or a public protest. Suggestions for professional journals are: Urban Affairs Review, Journal of Urban Affairs, The Municipal Finance Journal, National Civic Review.*

***April 1***

Regionalism  
Ad Hoc Alliances  
Coalition Building  
Conflict Resolution

***Read: Handout provided in class.***

***Assignment: In two pages, identify an issue area that requires collaboration between multiple entities and geographic areas. Describe the stakeholders and their interests. Search the internet and briefly describe an illustrative alliance or coalition. Five minute power point presentation on your findings.***

***April 8***

The Politics & Economics of Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid  
What can we afford a Social Welfare State?  
What can be done to correct the anticipated shortfall?  
Should the SS system slowly be privatized?  
How can we accomplish major changes in the health care system?

***Read: Handout provided in class and internet.***

***Assignment: In three pages, identify three potential solutions to the current debate about SS or health care reform (pick one). Indicate the major pros and cons of each solution as well as a short list of which groups and individuals support each solution (including the active presidential candidates).***

***April 15***

The Politics and Economics of Urban Sprawl  
Economic Development vs. Smart Planning  
Protectionism vs. Laissez Faire approaches  
The politics of land use  
Smart Growth

***Assignment: Search the internet. Pick two of the largest urban/metropolitan areas in the U.S. and summarize their policies or approaches (or lack of) to urban sprawl. Indicate any reasons why each of these communities is more or less active. Try to pick communities known for progress and compare them with a community not known for progress. Some of the web sites on Urban Sprawl and Smart Growth will help you identify the urban areas and players. Speculate on possible reasons for their policies/approaches. Some examples of Smart Growth are Portland, Denver, and Minneapolis. Poor examples are LA, Houston, and Atlanta. Two pages.***

***April 22***

Ethics  
Major Themes of Course  
Review for Final

***Read: Cohen, Chap. 14; Kettl, Chap. 14***

***April 29***

***Final Exam***