

# OBSERVING PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

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Meeting: Thursdays 6:45-9:30  
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## Overview

The careful, systematic observation of public organizations defines some of the most challenging and potentially fruitful avenues for scholarship in contemporary public administration. Drawing on a variety of approaches to the collection and interpretation of data, this course explores significant contributions to research in the field and guides participants in the development of an original research project.

Prerequisites for the course are PAPA 6514 or equivalent and familiarity with concepts covered in a standard introductory statistics course. Students are encouraged to contact with the instructor with any questions regarding prerequisites or the appropriateness of the course for their needs. If you have not recently taken a statistics course, I recommended that you review a basic statistics text. Below are two texts. The first is basic and cheap. The second is a clear and current introductory statistics textbook. This course proceeds on the assumption that students are familiar with the concepts they cover.

Robert M. Kaplan, 1986. *Basic Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences*. Allyn and Bacon, Inc.

Kenneth J. Meier, Jeffrey L. Brudney, John Bohte, 2005. *Applied Statistics for Public and Nonprofit Administration*, 6th edition. Wadsworth.

## Books

Most course readings will be posted to Scholar. However, I recommend you obtain copies of the following books:

James C. Scott. 1999. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale.

Martha Derthick. 1990. *Agency under stress : the Social Security Administration in American government*. Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution.

## Coursework

Five course elements each constitute 20 percent of the overall course evaluation:

1. **Participation** – Course participants agree to complete and be prepared to discuss both assigned readings, as well as work posted by other course participants. At the conclusion of the course a confidential peer-assessment will be administered, will include the following questions:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q1: Participant contributed to classroom discussion.	1	2	3	4	5
Q2: Participant provided constructive feedback.	1	2	3	4	5

Peer assessments will not factor directly, but will serve to inform the overall participation grade.

2. **Reading Summary and Response** – Participants will select **three (3)** course sections from **Sections 2-13** identified in the course schedule below. One week prior to the class period during which that section will be discussed, the designated participants will distribute a written summary and response to readings. These should identify important issues you believe are raised by the readings. They should be no less than 1 and no more than 10 pages.
3. **Essay #1** (≈2000 words) circulated to course participants Thursday **10/14**;
4. **Essay #2** (≈2000 words) circulated to course participants Thursday **12/2**;

**Essays #1 and #2** will be based on a choice of questions related to course readings, which will be distributed in class. Essays will be evaluated based on the following criteria: \

- **Question** – Does the paper respond effectively to the question or assignment?
- **Analysis** – Does the paper develop a clear and credible logic? Are the claims and conclusions supported by the material presented in the paper?
- **Grounding** – Does the author make effective use of course materials? Does the paper build on firm theoretical and factual foundations?
- **Readability** – Is the paper well-organized and written? Is the language clear? Is the paper generally free of typos, grammatical errors, and other distractions?

5. **Research Project** – Participants will develop or contribute to an original research project, which they will identify no later than **9/16** (please consult with me beforehand). Participants may identify their own project or contribute either individually or as a team to one of the following projects:

- **Project #1: Community Engagement** – Support one or both of two community engagement initiatives **Project for a Healthier Alexandria Community Indicators Initiative** and **Rappahannock United Way (RUW) 2010 Community Engagement Initiative**. Observe or assist in the collection and interpretation of group interview data.

- **Project #2: Information, Leadership, and Culture in City Government** – Interview city managers and other city government personnel about the use of information to reform budgeting and management.
- **Project #3: Administration Unfilled** – Contribute to original research investigating the causes and consequences of appointee vacancies.
- **Project #4: Oversight Overlooked** – Contribute to original research on a unique and little-known investigative agency Surveys & Investigations, which reports directly the House Appropriations Chair. What does this 50-year-old, virtually unknown agency tell us about the nature of Congressional oversight?
- **Project #5: The Political Economy of Competitive Grant Programs** – Contribute to original research on the distributive consequences of competitive grant programs. How does this increasingly popular policy instrument influence the distribution of program resources?
- **Project #6: Remembering Alexandria’s Samuel W. Tucker** – Learn about and contribute to the memory of Alexandria-native and civil rights pioneer Samuel Tucker.

Again, participants may select one of the above **or another project of their choosing**. Once a topic has been selected (again no later than 9/16), participants should provide regular research updates. Research updates may include article summaries, research notes, interview schedules and summaries, and other materials related to the project. As a benchmark, each participant should post at least **ten (10) substantial research updates on Scholar before 12/9**.

Research updates might respond to any number of questions, like: What articles and other resources do you believe are important for understanding the project? What contribution does each article make? What are the observations? Are they valid and reliable? Is the research reflected in course materials – do the details of real issues, policies, and organizations play out ideas in the course? If not, why not?

Work on this project will be evaluated at the conclusion of the semester based on review of the participants’ research updates. Also at the conclusion of the course a confidential peer-assessment will be administered, which will include the following questions:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q1: Participant clearly articulated project question and/or purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
Q2: The participant’s research updates and contributions to class indicate he/she made effective progress on the project during the semester.	1	2	3	4	5

## Course Schedule

### 1. Everything-stat

- Vincent E. Henry. 2003. Ch. 3-5. *The Compstat Paradigm: Management Accountability in Policing, Business and the Public Sector*. Looseleaf Law Publications.
- Robert D. Behn. 2006. "Varieties of Citistat." *Public Administration Review*.

#### Recommended

- Robert D. Behn. 2008. "Seven Big Errors of PerformanceStat." Kennedy School Policy Brief. February.

### 2. Transparency, Quantification, and Trust in Government

- Archong Fung, Mary Graham, and David Weil, Ch. 1-5, 7. *Full Disclosure: The Perils and Promise of Transparency*. Cambridge.
- Theodore M. Porter, 1995. Ch. 1-2 "A World of Artifice," "How Social Numbers Are Made Valid," *Trust in numbers: the pursuit of objectivity in science and public life*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press
- Review: Pew Research Center. 2010. "Distrust, Discontent, Anger and Partisan Rancor: The People and Their Government." <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/606.pdf>. April 18.

#### Recommended

- Anna A. Amirkhanyan. 2008. "Collaborative Performance Measurement: Examining and Explaining the Prevalence of Collaboration in State and Local Government Contracts." *JPART*.

### 3. Professionalism

- Eliot Freidson, 2001. *Professionalism: The Third Logic*. "Introduction" and Ch. 1-2, 5-8.
- Stephen Brint, 1994. *The Changing Role of Professionals in Politics and Public Life*, Ch. 1-2, 6. "Professionals and the Character of Democracy," "Professions as Organization and Status Category," and "The Influence of Policy Experts."
- Beverly A. Cigler. 1990. "Public Administration and the Paradox of Professionalization." *Public Administration Review*, 637-653.

#### Recommended

- Anne Khademian. 1995. "When Missions Matter: Professional Priorities and the 'Stepchild' of Supervisory Programs." *Governance* 8:1. January: 26-57.
- Anurag Sharma. 1997. "Professional as Agent: Knowledge Asymmetry in Agency Exchange." *Academy of Management Review* 22:3. 758-798.

### 4. Delegation

- Richard C. Feiock, Moon-Gi Jeong, Jaehoon Kim. 2003. "Credible Commitment and Council-Manager Government: Implications for Policy Instrument Choices." *Public Administration Review*. 63(5): 616-625.
- Carolyn Bourdeaux. 2007. "Politics versus Professionalism: The Effect of Institutional Structure on Democratic Decision Making in a Contested Policy Arena." *JPART*.
- David Epstein and Sharyn O'Halloran. 1999. Ch. 1-5, 8. *Delegating Powers: A Transaction Cost Approach to Policy Making Under Separated Powers*. Cambridge.

## 5. Seeing Like a State

→ James C. Scott. 1998. *Seeing Like a State*. Introduction, Ch. 1-4, 8-9.

## 6. Reputation

→ Daniel Carpenter. 2001. "Introduction" and Ch. 1. *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy*.

→ Kent Walker. 2010. "A Systematic Review of the Corporate Reputation Literature: Definition, Measurement, and Theory." *Corporate Reputation Review*. 12(4): 357-387.

→ Joel M. Podolny. 1993. "A Status-Based Model of Market Competition." *The American Journal of Sociology*. 98(4): 829-872.

### Recommended

→ David L. Deephouse and Mark Suchman. 2008. "Legitimacy in Organizational Institutionalism." *The Sage Handbook on Organizational Institutionalism*.

[https://apps.business.ualberta.ca/ddeephouse/Publications/Deephouse%20Suchman%202008%20Legitimacy%20chapter%20in%20Sage%20Handook%20\(2\).pdf](https://apps.business.ualberta.ca/ddeephouse/Publications/Deephouse%20Suchman%202008%20Legitimacy%20chapter%20in%20Sage%20Handook%20(2).pdf)

## 7. Leadership, Culture, and Routine Performance

→ Jim Hartmann and Anne Khademian. 2010. "Culture Change Refined and Revitalized: The Road Show and Guides for Pragmatic Action in Alexandria, Virginia." *Public Administration Review*.

→ Matthew Dull. 2010. "Considering and Reconsidering Organizational Culture: Sustaining Dialogue between Practitioners and Scholar." *Public Administration Review*.

→ Martha S. Feldman. 2000. "Organizational Routines as a Source of Continuous Change," *Organization Science* 11(6): 611-629.

→ Martha S. Feldman, 1995. Ch. 1-2, 4. *Strategies for Interpreting Qualitative Data*. Sage.

## 8. Agencies: Context and Competence

→ Martha Derthick. 1990. *Agency Under Stress : the Social Security Administration in American government*. Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution.

### Recommended

→ Jason L. Jensen; Robert Rodgers. 2001. Cumulating the Intellectual Gold of Case Study Research." *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 61, No. 2. (Mar. - Apr., 2001), pp. 235-246.

## 9. Government at a Distance

→ Carolyn J. Heinrich, Laurence E. Lynn Jr., and H. Brinton Milward. 2010. A State of Agents? Sharpening the Debate and Evidence over the Extent and Impact of the Transformation of Governance. *JPART*.

→ Christine A. Kelleher and Susan Webb Yackee. 2008. "A Political Consequence of Contracting: Organized Interests and State Agency Decision Making." *JPART*.

→ Christopher Berry, Barry Burden, and William Howell. 2010. "After Enactment: The Lives and Deaths of Federal Programs." *American Journal of Political Science*. January.54:(1): 1-17

### Recommended

David E. Lewis. 2002. The Politics of Agency Termination: Confronting the Myth of Agency Immortality. *The Journal of Politics*. 64: 89-107

## 10. Race, Discrimination, and the American State

- Desmond King, *Separate and Unequal*, Ch. 1-4.
- Zach Oberfield and Matthew Dull. "Representativeness, Diversity, and Federal Agency Leadership." Article Manuscript.

## 11. Redefining Race in Civil Rights in Virginia

- J. Douglass Smith. Ch. 3-5, 8-9. *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia*. University of North Carolina.

## 12. Policies and Publics

- Suzanne Mettler, 2002. "Bringing the State Back in to Civic Engagement: Policy Feedback Effects of the G.I. Bill for World War II Veterans." *The American Political Science Review* 96(2): 351-365.
- Joe Soss and Sanford F. Schram. 2007. "A Public Transformed? Policy Reform as Policy Feedback." *American Political Science Review*.
- Suzanne Mettler and Joe Soss. 2004. "The Consequences of Public Policy for Democratic Citizenship: Bridging Policy Studies and Mass Politics." *Perspectives on Politics*.2(1): 55-73.

## 13. Narrative

- Martha Feldman et al. 2004. "Making Sense of Stories: A Rhetorical Approach to Narrative Analysis." *JPART*. 14:2.
- Dodge, J., S. M. Ospina, et al. 2005. "Integrating Rigor and Relevance in Public Administration Scholarship: The Contribution of Narrative Inquiry." *Public Administration Review*. 65: 286-300.
- Mark K. McBeth, Elizabeth A. Shanahan, Ruth J. Arnell, and Paul L. Hathaway. 2007. "The Intersection of Narrative Policy Analysis and Policy Change Theory." *Policy Studies Journal*. 35(1): 87.

### Recommended

- Kathe Callahan, Melvin J. Dubnick, and Dorothy Olshfski. 2006. "War Narratives: Framing Our Understanding of the War on Terror," *Public Administration Review*. July/August.
- Ospina, S. M. and J. Dodge. 2005. "It's About Time: Catching Method Up to Meaning; The Usefulness of Narrative Inquiry in Public Administration Research." *Public Administration Review* 65: 143-157.