

Syllabus

PUBM 5010: Politics and Public Administration

Instructor: Professor Chengxin Xu

Seattle University

Fall 2025

Course Information:

Class Hours: Monday 6:00-8:40pm

Classroom: Pigott Building, 108

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Contents

1 Course Description	2
2 Student Learning Outcomes	2
3 Required Textbook and Materials	3
4 Course Evaluation	3
4.1 Extra Credits	5
5 Grading Policy	6
6 Course Policies	6

7 Academic Integrity Policy	7
7.1 The Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)	7
8 Disability Services	7
9 Statement of Diversity	8
10 Policy on Religious Accommodations	8
11 Course Schedule	9

1 Course Description

This course seeks to offer a comprehensive overview of public administration in the American system of government. It provides students with conceptual foundations they need, while also introducing them to important trends in the discipline.

The overarching question we will address in this class is: How politics influences public administration? The course is organized into three major themes. The first theme, "The Job of Government", identifies the role of government in American society and the nature of public administration in such political and cultural context. More specifically, this theme covers topics including what government does and how it does it, government strategies and tactics in policy process and public service delivery, and issues of administrative responsibility.

The second theme of the course is "Managing Public Organization", which probes theories underlying public organizations. It will explore the structure of the executive branch and its organizational problems that hamper its performance; it will also cover important theories of organizational behavior and expose challenges and strategies of human resource management with a special emphasis on social equity and diversity issues.

The final theme, "Making and Implementing Government Decisions", will cover topics including government decision making process, and implementation and performance. Under this theme, we will focus specifically on street-level bureaucrats' ethical decision making, unravel why good policies may lead to a major failure in the society, and how performance evaluation may or may not improve equitable and efficient public service delivery.

2 Student Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to ¹ ²:

¹Introduced; ‡Practiced; * Assessed.

²Following learning outcomes are to be practiced further in PUBM 5440: Applied Data Analysis.

1. Utilize established concepts of management and organization to frame and interpret organizational issues, such as human resource management, leadership, ethics, public performance, decision making and budgeting process, etc.; †
2. Analyze issues of public service regarding equity, efficiency, and economy, and offer prescriptions for change; ‡†*
3. Effectively communicate written and oral research findings on public issues to diverse populations; †

3 Required Textbook and Materials

Required:

Kettl, Donald F. *Politics of the Administrative Process* 7th Edition. SAGE Publications. (Any editions later than the 7th are acceptable.)

Klein, Ezra and Derek Thompson. *Abundance*. Avid Reader Press.

There are also a number of other readings, such as journal articles or book chapters. Any required reading materials other than textbooks will be available on Canvas.

Recommended Readings:

Fukuyama, Francis. (2011). *The origins of political order: From prehuman times to the French Revolution*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Derthick, Martha. (2011). *Agency under stress: The social security administration in American government*. Brookings Institution Press.

Peters, B. Guy. (2014). *The Politics of Bureaucracy*. Routledge.

Sandel, Michael J. (2012). *What money can't buy: The moral limits of markets*. Macmillan.

4 Course Evaluation

Students are expected to keep up with assigned readings and to participate actively in class discussions. There will be four projects and a final exam. Grades will be based on the following:

- Class participation — 10%
- Reading group discussion lead — 20%
- Problem Solving Project

- Real-world case submission (Learning Outcome 1, 2) — 20%
- Analytical report (Learning Outcome 2, 3) — 20%
- Action Recommendation (Learning Outcome 2, 3) — 20%
- Final Presentation — 10%

Class participation (10%): The successful completion of this seminar is based on discussion and interactions among students and the instructor. Students are expected to attend every class meeting, read assigned materials carefully, and bring constructive opinions and questions to the class. Sharing personal working experience is strongly recommended.

Reading group discussion lead (20%): From Week 2 through Week 5, part of our class will be organized as a reading group focused on Abundance. The class will be divided into three mini-groups of four members each (see your group assignment on Canvas).

Each week, one member of each mini-group will serve as the discussion leader, with the role rotating among group members. The discussion leader is responsible for:

- Preparing at least three thoughtful discussion questions based on the assigned chapters and posting them to the discussion board in advance.
- After the discussion, posting a brief summary of the group's conversation by replying to the original discussion thread.

Detailed guidelines for discussion leaders can be found on Canvas.

Problem-Solving Project (70%): This is a group project. The problem-solving project is designed to cultivate students' ability of identifying public administration problems in public services in a real-world context, illustrating potential theoretical explanations behind the fact, and providing constructive solutions to address the problem. As a group project, it contains following important parts:

- **Select a real-world case (20%) (2 pages):**
 - Students need to look through national or local, printed or online news media to identify a problem facing administrative agencies in the real-world. For example, The Seattle Times reported on Feb 25, 2019 about the software problem in the Washington State Department of Corrections that causes Washington prison inmates to be released too early or held too long (see details [here](#)).
 - Our textbook (Kettl) also provides a number of cases in public administration. Using one of them is acceptable; however, students who use textbook cases shall provide additional facts of the case from other credible sources.
 - Along with the case selection, student must also explain the importance of the issue: why the problem you identified is important, and/or what the benefits are when the problem is solved.
- **Analytical Report (20%) (3 pages):** In this part of the project, you are required to provide a thorough investigation of the agency in your case. The investigation is supposed to help you to identify potential problems that relate to the failure or flaws of the agency. You might specify the agency details from more than one of following aspects:

- Organizational Structure
 - Staffing/Personnel Administration
 - Budgeting
 - Performance Evaluation
 - ...
- **Action Recommendation (20%) (3 pages):** Based on your previous analysis of the problem and the agency, here you need to provide a specific course of action. This assignment should cover following parts:
 - Actions recommended to take.
 - Each action should be well-reasoned based on theoretical expectations.
 - The effect of recommended actions: pros and cons.
 - Evaluation strategies.
 - **Final Presentation (10%):** You will be presenting your problem-solving project to the whole class in the last session. The presentation should include a brief summary of the case you have selected, the major problem you have identified, and actions you recommended. Presentation for each group should no longer than 15 minutes. Please expect questions and discussions with the whole class.

APA (see a [guidance](#) here) is required in terms of writing style of your assignments. In-text citations are preferred to footnotes or endnotes. Writing clarity and quality are considered in grading. Please use a standard font such as Arial, Calibri, or Times New Roman. Pages should use 1-inch margins, single-spaced, with 12 point fonts. If you think you need help with your writing, talk to the professor. There are resources on campus to help you. Also feel free to seek for services of the [Writing Center at Seattle University](#).

Due dates of all assignments are listed on the Course Schedule and your Canvas Calendar.

4.1 Extra Credits

Pointing out inappropriate language use, inaccurate news, data, or evidence provides opportunities for all members of the class to learn. Therefore, extra credits will be awarded to students who hold the instructor accountable for language use and who conduct fact-checking in class.

Extra credits will be awarded for the following actions:

- Students who raise concerns about language use, supported by evidence from a validated source of information (e.g., Wikipedia), will be awarded **1 extra credit**. There's no limit to the number of times this credit can be earned.
- Students who conduct fact checks on news, data, or cases presented in class and correct misinformation with a validated source of information will be awarded **5 extra credits**. Again, there's no limit to the number of times this credit can be earned.

5 Grading Policy

Students' final grades will be calculated as follows:

A	94-100	A–	90-93	B+	87-89	B	83-86
B–	80-82	C+	77-79	C	73-76	C–	70-72
D+	67-69	D	63-66	D–	60-62	F	59 or less

Any students who want to challenge their course grade shall follow the Academic Grading Grievance Policy at Seattle University. The detail of the policy can be found [here](#). An agreement to receive an Incomplete (I) grade may be negotiated if your circumstances do not allow you to finish the course on time. The Incomplete Grades Policy of the university is available on the Office of the Registrar [website](#).

6 Course Policies

General Expectations: This a graduate-level course and so students are expected to be motivated to read and study the assigned textbooks and other materials carefully before class. This includes doing exercises from the textbook on your own to test your understanding of key concepts and methods. Regular attendance and keeping up with all readings and assignments is essential to doing well in this course.

Submitting Assignments: Assignments should be submitted via Canvas rather than e-mailed unless being required by the professor. Canvas optimizes the grading process and student-professor communication.

Late Submission: It is very important in this course to keep up with assignments and to hand them in on time. Grades will be reduced for late assignments, and the later the assignment, the greater the grade reduction. Students should expect a penalty for late assignments (not be graded higher than 8.5/10). Assignments that are submitted two or more weeks late will only be accepted for credit at the discretion of the professor and will not be graded higher than 7.5/10.

If you find that you are unable to complete an assignment on time, please communicate with me in advance. I do understand that life happens and can sometimes get in the way. I'll do my best to be flexible; for that to happen, we need to keep in dialogue so that I know where you are in your learning and how I can best support you.

Revising and Resubmitting Assignments: Students who receive a grade of less than 8/10 for an assignment AND who hand in the original assignment ON TIME will be given an opportunity to revise and resubmit the assignment. A change of grade will be made only for assignments that demonstrate a significant improvement through the student's own effort (making only minor corrections or edits in response to the professor's written feedback on the initial assignment will not be sufficient for a change of grade).

***IMPORTANT:** When resubmitting an assignment, students must attach a copy of the original assignment and grade sheet to the revised assignment. Resubmissions must be made within one week after the initial graded assignment has been returned to the student. The maximum grade possible for a resubmission is 8.5/10.

Keeping Your Assignments: Students should keep all of their completed assignments, including those graded and handed back, until well past the end of the term. Your original assignment with the grade on it is your evidence that you completed the assignment and received the grade that you earned.

The syllabus serves as a general outline. I reserve the right to deviate from any part of the plan as necessary. Students will be notified of any such modifications.

7 Academic Integrity Policy

Students must follow the school's [integrity policy](#). Please be aware that plagiarism and any forms of cheating will never be excused under any circumstances – **I will check each assignment carefully using plagiarism detection software**. Violation of these policies leads to immediate failure of the course. If you are not familiar or clear about the school's academic integrity policy, please refer to the tutorial [here](#).

7.1 The Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The use of the work or intellectual property of other persons or the outputs of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) programs (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, etc) presented as one's own work without appropriate citation or acknowledgment is now considered as plagiarism by the university policy. The use of AI is encouraged in this class especially for fact-checks, but please notice at the end of the assignment how AI has helped you to finish your work. Appropriate use of AI includes brainstorming, literature search and review, and language polishing.

8 Disability Services

Seattle University is committed to providing students with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in its classes and activities. This goal is fundamental to its belief in social justice. To achieve this goal, faculty and staff work together to remove barriers in physical access, communication, attitudes, and policies that can prevent students from taking part in programs. In addition, the University provides supplemental support services through the Disability Services Office.

Students who are requesting academic, housing, and meal plan accommodations for the first time are required to complete the new student application via the myDS New Student Application link and meet with [Disability Services](#) **before receiving services**. During the intake meeting, the student will discuss their goals at Seattle University, the assistance they may need in reaching them, and the creation of a personalized accommodations plan. Students must also provide documentation from a qualified diagnostician that:

- Establishes the nature of their disability.

- Provides evaluative data with test names and scores supporting their current need for specific accommodations.
- May list services recommended for the student.

Documentation is confidential and will not be released or discussed with the student's permission. For more information, please see the Documentation page and Requirements for Documentation of Disabilities.

If the student needs, or expects to need, an accommodation not supported by their documentation, the student should discuss options for additional evaluation with DS Staff.

For more information regarding disability services, please see [here](#).

9 Statement of Diversity

Seattle University celebrates educational excellence achieved through diversity. In the meanwhile, diversity is a central topic in the field of public and nonprofit administration. In this class, we will frequently face opportunities and challenges of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We will have discussion of the normative and pragmatic value of diversity and learn how to embrace it.

Students are encouraged to honor the uniqueness of themselves and peers, and to appreciate the opportunities we have to learn from each other. In particular, students are welcomed to share their personal experience regarding diversity policies and management. Students have to demonstrate respect to others' opinions and refrain from personal attacks, hatred language, and personal judgments.

10 Policy on Religious Accommodations

Consistent with Washington State law (RCW 28.10.039), it is the policy of Seattle University to reasonably accommodate students who, due to the observance of religious holidays, expect to be absent or endure a significant hardship during certain days of their academic course or program.

A student seeking accommodations under this policy must provide a written request to the student's faculty member: (i) within fourteen (14) calendar days from the first day of classes of the academic quarter in which the student is requesting accommodations; and (ii) identifying the specific dates the student requests accommodations.

For more details about the policy on religious accommodations for students, please see [here](#).

Please see the course schedule at the next page.

11 Course Schedule

Readings for the week are listed on Canvas.

Week 01, 09/29 - 10/03: Introduction & Overview

Week 02, 10/06 - 10/10: The Job of Government

Week 03, 10/13 - 10/17: Organizational Theory

Week 04, 10/20 - 10/24: Human Capital (Motivation)

Week 05, 10/27 - 10/31: Human Capital (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion)

Week 06, 11/03 - 11/07: Decision Making

Week 07, 11/10 - 11/14: Budgeting and Finance

Week 08, 11/17 - 11/21: Implementation and Performance

Week 09, 11/24 - 11/28: Administrative Reform

Week 10, 12/01 - 12/05: Final Presentation