AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, DC

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PERSONAL MPAP HANDBOOK   PUAD 688

PUAD 612:
INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND THE POLICY PROCESS

Key Concepts and Theories:

- **Memos and Briefs** are designed to inform or advise on specific matters, often requiring overviews (memo) along with detailed understanding and implications (brief).

- **Some Types of Memos**:

    - **Recommendation Memos**: Offer guidance and policy analysis in a condensed format.

    - **Action Memos**: Demand a decision or further action from the addressee.

    - **Information Memos**: Serve to inform or instruct, flowing from superiors to subordinates and vice versa.

    - **Speaking Points Memos**: Provide relevant information and suggested speaking points for public speaking or press releases.

- **Organizational Context and Culture**: The format, content, and expectations for memos are usually influenced by the organizational structure and the writer's position within it.

Practical Insights:

- **Iterative Writing Process**: Memos often undergo revisions to meet the standards or expectations of superiors, emphasizing the importance of adaptability and feedback in professional writing.

- **Confidentiality**: Awareness of the confidential nature of many memos, especially in draft form, is crucial in maintaining professional integrity and trust.

Reflection:

The ability to craft effective memos and briefs is pivotal in public administration and policy. These documents play a critical role in shaping policies, guiding decisions, and facilitating clear and effective communication within and between organizations. The varied types of memos reflect the diverse needs and situations professionals encounter, from providing recommendations to delivering key information for decision-making or public communication. Understanding the nuances of memo writing, including its purpose, audience, and the organizational context, equips public administration professionals with a powerful tool for influencing policy and practice. Moreover, the emphasis on the iterative process and confidentiality highlights the collaborative and sensitive nature of administrative work, underscoring the importance of precision, discretion, and professionalism in public service.

This course's focus on memos and briefs was a great starting point for the MPAP program. While I had read and written similar documents before, I had never had specific training on the topic and found this helpful and foundational to what would become the next two years. I was also pleased that some of the assignments from this course were particularly relevant and timely – using the COVID Pandemic as an example. That was not the case with every course that followed.

PUAD 606: FOUNDATIONS OF PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS

Key Concepts and Theories: Bardach's Eightfold Path

1. **Problem Definition**: Emphasizes factual, diagnostic problem descriptions to avoid credibility issues and unnecessary scrutiny.

2. **Evidence Assembly**: Stresses the importance of purposeful data collection, credibility, and consensus, cautioning against biased sources.

3. **Constructing Alternatives**: Encourages expansive thinking followed by focused narrowing to identify viable policy options.

4. **Criteria Selection**: Identifies effectiveness, efficiency, equality, and other critical evaluative criteria for policy alternatives.

5. **Outcome Projection**: Highlights the challenge of forecasting policy outcomes due to the inherent uncertainty of the future.

6. **Trade-Offs Confrontation**: Focuses on quantifiable trade-offs and compromises necessary in policy formulation.

7. **Decision Process**: Urges a focused, iterative approach to refine and finalize policy decisions.

8. **Storytelling**: Underlines the importance of concise, relatable communication tailored to the audience's needs and perspectives.

Practical Insights:

- Avoiding the inclusion of implicit solutions in problem definitions and considering the broader context are crucial for unbiased policy development.

- The iterative nature of assembling evidence and refining alternatives underscores the dynamic and adaptable process of policy analysis.

- The selection of criteria and projection of outcomes involve balancing analytical rigor with the practical realities and ethical considerations of policy impacts.

- Effective policy communication transcends data, emphasizing the human element and the real-world implications of policy decisions.

Reflection:

I enjoyed learning about the eightfold path and employed it multiple times throughout the MPAP program, though never as directly and explicitly as in PUAD 688 when the path merged with project management. PUAD 606's foundational framework for policy analysis effectively blended theory with practical application. From defining problems accurately to conveying policy proposals effectively, each step was designed to build on the previous one, giving us a comprehensive and thoughtful analysis. I was also pleased to see the ethical and moral considerations inherent in policymaking, reminding us to consider the practical consequences of our analyses and decisions. I found the logic model useful, though, perhaps, a bit challenging to navigate.

PUAD 617: PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Key Concepts and Theories:

- **Project Management Fundamentals**: Establishes a solid foundation in project management concepts and principles, emphasizing the complexity of managing projects with tight schedules and limited resources.

- **Case Study Application**: Utilizes real-world cases like the Battle of Mogadishu, Healthcare.gov rollout, and The Big Dig to illustrate practical challenges and solutions, reinforcing theoretical knowledge with practical application.

- **High-Reliability Organizations (HROs)**: Introduces the concept of HROs and explores their strategies for managing complexity and minimizing failures, encouraging students to consider these principles in various organizational contexts.

- **Agile and Traditional Methodologies**: Covers both agile project management practices and traditional methodologies, highlighting their respective strengths and applications in different project environments.

Practical Insights:

- **Comprehensive Risk Management**: Focuses on identifying, assessing, and managing risks to ensure project success, using examples from the case studies to illustrate effective strategies.

- **Leadership and Team Management**: Examines essential leadership qualities and team dynamics, drawing lessons from critical case studies like the Chilean miners' rescue to emphasize the role of decisive leadership in project management.

- **Agile Implementation in Public Agencies**: Discusses how agile practices can be adapted and implemented in public administration settings to improve efficiency and responsiveness.

- **Effective Performance Measurement**: Explores tools and techniques for monitoring project progress and performance, including agile tools like burnup and burndown charts and traditional methods like Earned Value Management (EVM).

Reflection:

This course, like others, presented a number of project management theories and practices, tailored to actual public and private sector projects. We used the healthcare.gov, Chilean miner, and Big Dig case studies throughout the course and beyond. With both theoretical study and hands-on case analysis, we examined the multifaceted nature of project management, from foundational concepts to advanced applications. We used our existing knowledge of the iterative process (PUAD 612) and steps 2-4 of Bardach (PUAD 606) often as we discussed the necessary adaptations and pivots necessary in project management – also discussed in PUAD 650.

PUAD 660: QUANTATIVE METHODS

Key Concepts and Theories:

- **Statistical Foundations in Public Policy**: Introduction to essential statistical concepts, software, and methods; tailored for analyzing public administration and policy issues; descriptive and inferential statistics and how they are manipulated for analysis.

- **Data Analysis Tools**: Proficiency in using IBM SPSS for statistical analysis and graphical presentation, plus basic skills in Microsoft Excel for data manipulation and visualization.

- **Research Design**: Understanding and implementing the steps of a research project from formulating a research question to drawing conclusions based on statistical analysis.

- **Building and Combining**: These three concepts merge to great the final Analytical Report – Nursing Homes in the United States.

Practical Insights:

- **Quantitative Data Analysis**: Application of statistical techniques for hypothesis testing, making inferences, and deriving meaningful conclusions from numeric data, utilizing tools like frequency distributions, chi-square tests, and regressions.

- **SPSS Application**: Hands-on experience in conducting data analysis with SPSS, including obtaining and interpreting outputs for real-life data sets.

- **Report Writing**: Skills in composing analytical reports that convey statistical findings and insights to inform and address issues within public administration and public policy.

Reflection:

This was a challenge. Theoretically, math does not scare me, but the SPSS software interface was archaic and reminded me of some of the first computer software I used as a kid in the 90s. I had to consult a coworker who used to use the software to succeed in the course. The Demonstrations and Practice Problems were invaluable in this course. It did bridge theoretical statistical concepts with practical applications and helped me analyze and interpret data effectively, as the introduction intended. The way that each lesson built on previous steps, adding individual, digestible layers together until we reached a final product was a valuable example, in itself, for policy evaluation and project management. The statistical competence we learned fostered an appreciation for the role data plays in informing policy decisions and administrative strategies.

As in PUAD 606, I appreciated the iterative, project-management style approach to the analysis assignment, with each step building upon the prior one until we ultimately had our final analysis papers.

PUAD 661: FOUNDATIONS OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

Key Concepts and Theories:

- **Research Design and Methodology**: Exploration of various research designs and methodological tools for evaluating program necessity, implementation, and impact, considering organizational, programmatic, and political influences.
  - **Evaluation Questions**: needs assessment, process evaluation, program theory assessment, efficiency evaluation, impact/outcome evaluation.
  - **Data Types**: cross-sectional, time series, panel/longitudinal.
  - **Evaluation Considerations**: political, organizational, ethical, programmatic.
- **Data Analysis**: Using regression analysis knowledge (SPSS / Excel), with applications in program evaluation for data analysis and management.

Practical Insights:

- **Critical Evaluation**: Distinguishing high-quality evaluations from low-quality ones, enabling critical consumption of evaluation studies.
- **Evaluation Design and Execution**: evaluation questions, hypotheses, research designs, and data collection plans.
- **Influential Factors**: Organizational, programmatic, and political contexts can shape evaluation processes and outcomes.

Reflection:

I approached this course with some skepticism, as I don't foresee a future where I'll be directly working with program evaluations but tried to approach it openly for the value it would hold. In the end, I found the Impact Evaluation project and the class discussions most valuable. Identifying the research questions and study designs were useful, but I very much appreciated comparing and contrasting internal vs. external validity. There were challenges in that process, but establishing validity is something I use in my real-life communications role regularly, and it's crucial for understanding the real-world effects of data and policies. I was also able to write about consumer behavior related to climate change, a subject about which I'm very passionate. I did not find reintroducing the Outcomes Matrix or Logic Models helpful in any way. I found the problem sets very useful in this course.

PUAD 630: PUBLIC MANAGERIAL ECONOMICS

Key Concepts and Theories:

- **Thinking Like an Economist**: Decision-making, marginal analysis, and the rational choice model, require optimal decision-making and the identification of opportunity costs.

- **Supply, Demand, and Elasticities**:

    o The magnitude of changes in equilibrium outcomes is directly related to the slope of the supply and demand curves.

    o The slope, or relationship between price and quantit), is characterized by the elasticity of supply.

    ▪ Elasticities are measurements of the relationship between two variables.

    ▪ Used to characterize the relationship between price and quantity supplied, income and quantity demanded, and price of one good for a different good.

- **Market Failures:**

    o Imperfect Competition

    o Irrational Behavior

    o Missing Property Rights and Information

- **Game Theory**: Mathematical framework used to analyze strategic interactions among rational decision-makers. Explores how individuals make choices that lead to optimal outcomes based on the anticipated actions of others.

- **Behavioral Economics**: Blends insights from psychology and economics to understand how people actually make decisions, challenging traditional economic theory that assumes rational behavior. Cognitive biases, emotions, and social influences affect economic choices, which is why people sometimes make seemingly irrational decisions that deviate from optimal economic predictions.

Reflection:

This was my first course in economics, and I found it challenging but valuable. After so much writing in previous courses, the multiple-choice nature of the exams was a nice change. The course introduced the basics of economic principles through the lens of public policy. The concepts, like individual decision-making, market dynamics, and government intervention, discussed how economic factors influence public administration and policymaking. I enjoyed my faux role as an analyst and applying economic theories to local, state, or federal policy issues. I also enjoyed the behavioral aspect in contrast to the more data driven PUAD 660 & 661.

PUAD 633: BUDGETING AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Key Concepts and Theories:

- **Levels & Types of Government**: Federal, State, Municipal, Local, General Purpose, Special District

- **Key Budget Components**: Revenues, expenditures, debt, deficit.

- **Budget Categories**: Revenues, expenditures, programs, debt levels.

- **Key Financial Documents**: Balance sheet, activity statement, cash flow statement.

- **Modern Budgeting Challenges**: Stimulating economies, managing fiscal stress, ensuring sustainable service delivery amidst financial constraints.

Practical Insights:

- **Flexible Budgets with Excel**: Financial plan that adjusts expenses based on changes in actual revenue or other financial indicators; allows for more accurate financial forecasting and planning by automatically updating budgeted amounts to reflect actual performance.

- **Government Debts**: General obligation (G.O.) bond and revenue bond.

Reflection:

I confess I found this course incredibly frustrating. The interactive exercises explaining how budgeting worked were useful and interesting. They bridged the gap between theoretical budgeting principles and their practical application in contemporary governance contexts. The focus on real-world applications, like the fiscal situations in Detroit and Puerto Rico, offered a pragmatic lens for us to see the challenges and opportunities inherent in public financial management. Additionally, the enhanced use of Excel built on my existing knowledge and was, perhaps, one of the most useful practical skills I learned in 2 years.

However, the assignments in this course were ridiculous. Identifying the fiscal issues with Detroit? Solving Puerto Rico budget problems? That's an unreasonable ask for a graduate student. If seasoned budget, management, and policy officials couldn't solve these problems, what in hell were we supposed to add? A more reasonable approach would have been to assign invented scenarios, based on these cases, that could have actually been solved, or at least improved, using the theories and practices we studied.

PUAD 626: Legal Issues in Public Administration

Key Concepts and Theories:

- **Legal Foundations in Public Management**: Federal constitutional and administrative law have a major impact on public administrators' decisions, actions, and operations.

- **Constitutional Competence**: Non-technical constitutional knowledge required by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and mandated by federal courts, covering individual rights under the U.S. Constitution relevant to public management.

- **Elements of Justiciability**:

  - **Standing**: The party bringing the lawsuit must have a direct stake in the outcome, showing they have suffered or will suffer a concrete injury.

  - **Ripeness**: The issue must be ready for judicial decision, not based on hypothetical future events.

  - **Mootness**: The case must still be relevant at the time of review, not rendered moot by subsequent events.

  - **Political Question Doctrine**: The issue must be a legal question suitable for judicial resolution, not a matter left to another branch of government.

  - **No Advisory Opinions**: Courts cannot give advisory opinions on hypothetical scenarios; there must be an actual case or controversy.

- **Fourth Amendment**: Lays out a structured analysis to determine the legality of government actions:

  - **Expectation of Privacy**: Determine whether the individual had a legitimate expectation of privacy in the place or thing searched.

  - **Government Action**: Establish that the search or seizure was conducted by a government agent or someone acting on behalf of the government.

  - **Reasonableness of Search or Seizure**: If there was a reasonable expectation of privacy, evaluate the reasonableness of the government's action. This usually requires a valid warrant, obtained with probable cause and specifying the place to be searched and the persons or things to be seized. Exceptions: consent, exigent circumstances, automobile searches, items in plain view.

  - **Exclusionary Rule**: If a search or seizure is deemed unreasonable, evidence obtained as a result may be excluded from trial under the exclusionary rule.

Reflection:

This course was a lot of work! So many cases to review! Even though the professor made it clear that we did not have to intimately know every case, just the briefings and high-level review were very intense. It well covered the relationship between public administration and its legal underpinnings. Though a lot of work, the practical application through case studies and legal analysis did lead to a deeper appreciation for the role of law in shaping public administration practices and policies. It gave us a good overview of the legal challenges of our future roles: uphold constitutional values, promote justice, and contribute to the effective and ethical governance of public institutions. I most appreciated that the final exercise was formatted as a conversation rather than a formal legal paper or brief. This is, most likely, the extent of legal knowledge I will need in my future career, and it made the pressure of the course decrease while increasing the enjoyment of the workload.

PUAD 684: ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

Key Concepts and Decision Making Theories:

- **Organizational Dynamics**: How organizations operate, important elements include political environment, organizational structure, staffing, information management, and budgetary constraints.

- **Rational Decision-Making**:

    o Assumes individuals have complete information and can objectively analyze all options.

    o Decisions are made to maximize utility or benefit.

    o Contrast: Real-life decisions often suffer from incomplete information and biases, challenging the assumption of perfect rationality.

- **Behavioral Economics**:

    o Integrates insights from psychology into economic decision-making.

    o Highlights how heuristics and biases (e.g., loss aversion, anchoring) influence choices, leading to deviations from rational decision-making.

    o Contrast: Challenges the classical economic assumption of rational actors by emphasizing systematic patterns of irrationality.

- **Group Decision-Making**:

    o Involves multiple individuals making a collective choice, often leading to outcomes like groupthink, where the desire for harmony overrides realistic appraisal of alternatives.

    o Can leverage diverse perspectives, potentially leading to more informed decisions.

    o Contrast: Individual decision-making theories don't account for group dynamics and their impact on the decision process.

- **Intuitive Decision-Making**:

    o Relies on gut feelings or instincts rather than detailed analysis.

    o Often used in situations requiring quick judgments or when data is limited.

    o Contrast: Rational and Bounded Rationality theories emphasize systematic analysis over intuition.

Reflection:

This was one of my favorite courses. The cases we reviewed, the assignments we were given, and the team to which I was assigned. As future managers or leaders, we discussed the important role we will one day play in influencing both mundane and critical aspects of public life. Managing organizations is complex. The highlight of this course, and one of the entire program, was the all-student "summit" in which we participated. The breakdown of assignments into teams, each with an individual focus, and the work structure – individual, small team, and total class – was the best use of the group work I've experienced. It was also the most realistic compared to actual employment group activities. It was far more realistic than the Practicum dynamic so far.

PUAD 665: MANAGING HUMAN CAPITAL ASSETS

Key Concepts and Theories:

- **Legal and Constitutional Framework**: The legal environment influences public HR management, including constitutional protections and equal employment opportunities.

- **First Amendment - Free Speech**:

  o *Pickering v. Board of Education (1968)*: Established that public employees have the right to speak on matters of public concern as private citizens, and such speech is protected under the First Amendment, as long as it does not interfere with their job duties or disrupt the workplace.

  o *Garcetti v. Ceballos (2006)*: Clarified that when public employees make statements pursuant to their official duties, they are not speaking as citizens for First Amendment purposes, and the Constitution does not insulate their communications from employer discipline.

- **Fourth Amendment - Search and Seizure**:

  o *O'Connor v. Ortega (1987)*: Addressed the Fourth Amendment rights of public employees regarding searches of their workplace, determining that such searches must be reasonable under the circumstances. The reasonableness standard applies both to the inception of the search and to its scope.

- **Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments - Due Process**:

  o *Cleveland Board of Education v. Loudermill (1985)*: Affirmed that public employees who are subject to termination or significant discipline have a property interest in their employment and are entitled to due process, which includes the right to notice and an opportunity to be heard.

  o *Board of Regents v. Roth (1972)*: Determined that public employees must have a "legitimate claim of entitlement" to their job to have a property interest protected by due process, which can arise from statutes, contracts, or mutual understandings.

- **Fourteenth Amendment - Equal Protection**:

  o *McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green (1973)*: Established a framework for analyzing claims of employment discrimination under the Equal Protection Clause, requiring employees to show prima facie discrimination, after which the burden shifts to the employer to articulate a legitimate, non-discriminatory reason for the employment action.

Reflection:

Human capital is crucial in achieving organizational objectives, particularly within the public sector where the management of human resources is influenced by complex political, legal, and technical factors. By dissecting the core functions of HRM and situating them within the public administration framework, the course helped us navigate the unique landscape of public sector HR management using the Constitution as a basis. The examples and coursework from this course were useful and tied in very well to the learning resources. It stressed, many times, the human in HR and set a valuable precedent to our Leadership coursework.

PUAD 650: LEADERSHIP IN A CHANGING WORKPLACE

Key Concepts and Theories:

- **Four Levels of Leadership**:

    - **Direct Leadership**: Involves close, personal guidance and interaction between the leader and followers, often in small teams or units.

    - **Organizational Leadership**: Focuses on influencing a broader organizational environment through policy, culture, and strategic direction, with less direct interaction.

    - **Strategic Leadership**: Extends influence beyond the organization to shape industries or sectors with a long-term vision and mobilization of wide-ranging resources.

    - **Transformational Leadership**: Inspires followers to transcend self-interests for the group's good, leading to significant changes in beliefs and values.

- **Growth Culture**: Prioritizes continuous improvement, values challenges as opportunities for development, and fosters an environment where taking risks and learning from failures are encouraged. Emphasizes adaptability, feedback, and the belief that skills and intelligence can be developed over time.

- **Learning Leader**: Embodies curiosity, openness to new ideas, and a commitment to personal and professional growth. Actively seeks feedback, reflective about their experiences, and view leadership as an ongoing journey of development rather than a fixed state.

- **EI Model**:

    - **Self-Awareness**: Involves understanding one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, and values.

    - **Self-Management**: Entails managing one's emotions and impulses effectively.

    - **Social Awareness**: Concerns understanding and empathizing with others' emotions.

    - **Relationship Management**: Focuses on managing interactions and relationships positively.

- **VUCA World** (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous): Requires Teaming. Teaming, the process of bringing people together to collaborate on complex issues, is crucial for several reasons: adaptability, diverse perspectives, innovation, learning and development, resilience.

Reflection:

Integrating course content with personal journal reflections challenged me at first. I do not enjoy journaling. However, I did enjoy it in the limited and specific context we were given here. While the material established leadership as a non-innate trait and presented it instead as a skill set comprising empathy, adaptability, and emotional intelligence that can be developed and refined, I was not entirely convinced. I do think a certain amount of leadership is innate, though the traits we discussed can

The reflective journaling process, along with the material's theoretical framework, did highlight my personal journey from understanding leadership as a positional authority to recognizing it as an intrapersonal and interpersonal relational process. I had begun that journey long before this course, but I did benefit from reviewing it in a new way.