

*The Foundations of Public Administration Series* is a collection of articles written by experts in 20 content areas, providing introductory essays and recommending top articles in those subjects.

## **The Executive Branch of American Government**

### **Syllabus**

#### **Purpose of the Course**

The purpose of this course is to provide students with a professional level working knowledge of the executive branch of the United States Government. The development of executive branch departments and agencies will be examined from the origins of the Constitution through contemporary managerial issues facing the executive branch. Particular emphasis will be placed on major turning points in executive branch development, such as the creation of the merit system, the organizational genesis of the Executive Office of the President, the growth of the White House staff, and the outsourcing of many formerly-governmental jobs to the private sector.

#### **Course Objective**

This course will prepare masters level students for professional service in the executive branch and prepare those in the private or non-profit sectors to work with the American executive branch in their professional capacities.

#### **Knowledge Competencies**

1. Familiarity with the origins of the United States Constitution and its implications for the executive branch of government.
2. Appreciation of the development of the executive branch and the major turning points in its history.
3. Understanding the way in which personnel policy and selection affect the ability of the executive branch to carry out its mission of faithfully executing the laws.
4. Understanding the role of the president as chief executive and the role the White House staff has come to play in policy making and administration.
5. How career executives interact with political appointees at different levels in the organization of the executive branch.
6. Understanding of the political and policy implications of the organization and structure of the executive branch.

#### **Skill Competencies**

1. The ability to read critically scholarly analyses of executive branch organization and write cogently about it.
2. The ability to build a bibliography of relevant scholarly sources in order to carry out research.
3. The ability to use electronic data bases to locate scholarship
4. The ability to locate and use government documents in research about the executive branch.
5. The ability to make coherent, professional presentations before a group of colleagues.

# PAR

## Foundations of Public Administration

Managing the Executive Branch in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – Syllabus

*James P. Pfiffner and Mary Boardman*

### Course Texts

Most of the readings will come from *Public Administration Review*, which can be accessed from one's personal subscription or from a university data base. Other articles and books will be recommended and some will be required.

Books useful to the understanding of the executive branch:

Peri Arnold, *Making the Managerial Presidency*

Harold Seidman, *Politics, Position, and Power*

Paul Light, *The Tides of Reform*

Richard Stillman, *The American Bureaucracy*

James Pfiffner, ed. *The Managerial Presidency*

### Course Evaluation

Class participation: 20%

Op-ed essay 15%

Memorandum 20%

Research paper 30%

Oral Presentation: 15%

### Class Format

The course will be conducted as a seminar rather than in a lecture format. Thus each week's assignment must be read before class discussions each week. Active participation in class discussions is mandatory. Professionals in public policy must be able to speak effectively in small groups and to make presentations of their work. The only way to learn these skills is to practice, so students are expected to contribute to classroom discussions and will make a presentation of their own research in class. It is expected that students will keep up with policy developments in the executive and legislative branches in the national government. In addition class participation each student will present his or her research paper to the class during the final class periods. Instructions for class presentations are at the end of the syllabus.

### Evaluation

For purposes of this course, the grades of **A or A-** are reserved for sustained excellence and outstanding performance in all aspects of the course. The grades of **B and B+** are used to denote mastery of the material and very good performance in all aspects of the course. The grade of **B-** denotes marginal quality work that is not quite up to graduate level standards. The grade of **C** denotes work that is not acceptable at the graduate level. The grade of **F** denotes the failure to perform adequately on course assignments.

Attendance in class is required and will be taken into account in evaluation for the course. While it is possible that the requirements of full time jobs may occasionally conflict with class times, missing more than two class sessions will make it virtually impossible to earn a grade higher than B for the course. Missing more than three sessions will make a grade of C likely.

## Classroom Courtesy

Civility and respect toward all members of the class are expected; disagreements among members of the class (or with the instructor) are useful and illuminating, but mutual respect is mandatory. Taking notes on your laptop is fine, but playing games, checking e-mail, or reading sports scores is not. If you do these things when I am talking, I will merely be annoyed. But if you do these things when another student is speaking, you will lose points on your class participation grade.

## Outline of the course (by week)

### **1. The Constitutional Origins of American Government**

The Declaration of Independence  
The Constitution of the United States of America  
Federalist 10 and 51  
Federalist 68, 69, 70

### **2. The Administrative State**

Stillman, II, Richard J. 1987. "The Constitutional Bicentennial and the Centennial of the American Administrative State." *Public Administration Review*. 47(1), The American Constitution and the Administrative State: 4-8.

Stillman, II, Richard J. 1990. "The Peculiar "Stateless" Origins of American Public Administration and the Consequences for Government Today." *Public Administration Review*. 50(2): 156-167.

Van Riper, Paul P. 1983. "The American Administrative State: Wilson and the Founders-An Unorthodox View." *Public Administration Review*. 43(6): 477-490.

Waldo, Dwight. 1948, 1984. *The Administrative State*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. NY: Holmes and Meier, Introduction, Chapters 9, 10, 11.

### **3. The Merit System and the Executive Branch**

Brook, Douglas A., and Cynthia L. King. 2007. "Civil Service Reform as National Security: The Homeland Security Act of 2002." *Public Administration Review*. 67(3): 399-407.

Patricia Ingraham, *The Foundation of Merit*

James P. Pfiffner and Douglas Brook, eds., *The Future of Merit*, Introduction and Chapters 1, 9, 10.

John A. Rohr, *Civil Servants and their Constitutions*, Chapters 4, 5.

#### **4. The Principles of Classical Public Administration Theory**

Taylor, Frederick Winslow. 1915. *The Principles of Scientific Management*. New York: Harper and Brothers.

Wilson, Woodrow. 1887. "The Study of Administration." *Political Science Quarterly*. 2(2): 197-222.

Gulick, Luther, and L. Urwick, eds. 1937. "Notes of the Theory of Organization." *Papers on the Science of Administration*. New York: Institute of Public Administration.

Moe, Ronald C. 1990. "Traditional Organizational Principles and the Managerial Presidency: From Phoenix to Ashes." *Public Administration Review*. 50(2): 129-140.

Richard Stillman, *Preface to Public Administration*, Chapters 1, 5 8.

#### **5. The Nature of Bureaucracy**

Max Weber, "Bureaucracy," in H.H. Gerth and C.Wright Mills, I, pp. 196-244.

James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy*, Chapters 1, 2, 14, 20.

Richard Stillman, *The American Bureaucracy*, Chapters 1, 4, 7.

Paul Light, *Thickening Government*, Chapters 1, 3, 6.

#### **6. The Executive Branch and the Presidency**

Arnold, Peri, 1986. *Making the Managerial Presidency*, Princeton University Press.

Benda, Peter M., and Charles H. Levine. 1986. "OMB and the Central Management Problem: Is Another Reorganization the Answer?" *Public Administration Review*. 46(5): 379-391.

James P. Pfiffner. 2007. "The First MBA President: George W. Bush as Public Administrator." *Public Administration Review*. 67(1).

James P. Pfiffner, *The Modern Presidency*, Chapters 3, 4, 5.

## **7. The Role of the White House Staff and Cabinet Secretaries**

Brownlow, Louis, et. al. 1937. *Report of the President's Committee on Administrative Management in the Government of the United States*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Fox, Douglas M. 1973. "The President's Proposals for Executive Reorganization: A Critique." *Public Administration Review*. 33(5): 401-406.

John Hart, *The Presidential Branch*, Chapters 1, 2, 4, 7.

Bradley Patterson, *The White House Staff*, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 15, 22.

## **8. Executive Branch Organization**

Harold Seidman, *Politics, Position, and Power*, Chapters 1 - 9.

Brownlow, Louis. 1941. "A General View." *Public Administration Review*. 1(2): 101-105.

Moe, Ronald C., and Robert Gilmour. 1995. "Rediscovering Principles of Public Administration: The Neglected Foundation of Public Law." *Public Administration Review*. 55(2): 1-13.

Moe, Ronald C. 1990. "Traditional Organizational Principles and the Managerial Presidency: From Phoenix to Ashes." *Public Administration Review*. 50(2): 129-140.

## **9. Organization and Reorganization**

Fox, Douglas M. 1973. "The President's Proposals for Executive Reorganization: A Critique." *Public Administration Review*. 33(5): 401-406.

Paul C. Light, 2006. "The Tides of Reform Revisited: Patterns in Making Government Work, 1945-2002." *Public Administration Review*. 66(1): 6-19.

Nixon, Richard. 1970. "Reorganization Plan No. 2 of 1970." *Public Administration Review*. 30(6): 611-619.

## 10. Managing the Executive Branch

Radin, Beryl A. 1998. "The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA): Hydra-headed monster or flexible management tool?" *Public Administration Review*. 58(4): 307-406.

Stone, Donald C. 1990. "Administrative Management: Reflections on Origins and Accomplishments." *Public Administration Review*. 50(1): 3-20.

Paul Light, *A Government Ill Executed*, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 5.

James P. Pfiffner. 2005. "Traditional Public Administration versus The New Public Management: Accountability versus Efficiency." *Institutionenwandel in Regierung und Verwaltung: Festschrift für Klaus König*. Eds. Arthur Benz, Heinrich Siedentopf, and Karl-Peter Sommermann. Berlin, Germany: Duncker & Humblot. 443-454.

Graham T. Allison in "Public and Private Management: Are They Fundamentally Alike in All Unimportant Respects?" in *Proceedings for the Public Management Research Conference* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Personnel Management, 1980), pp. 27-38.

Breul, Jonathan D. 2007. "Three Bush Administration Management Reform Initiatives: The President's Management Agenda, Freedom to Manage Legislative Proposals, and the Program Assessment Rating Tool." *Public Administration Review*. 67(1): 21-26.

## 11. Political Appointees and Career Executives

Aberbach, Joel D., and Bert A. Rockman. 1988. Mandates or Mandarins? Control and Discretion in the Modern Administrative State." *Public Administration Review*. 48(2): 606-612.

Heclo, Hugh. 1979. *A Government of Strangers*. Brookings.

Heclo, Hugh. 1987. "The In-and-Out System: A Critical Assessment." *The In-and-Outers*. Ed. C.G. Mackenzie. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 195-216.

Heclo, Hugh. 1999. "OMB and Neutral Competence." *The Managerial Presidency*. Ed. James P. Pfiffner. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press.

Ingraham, Patricia W., James R. Thompson, and Elliot F. Eisenberg. 1995. "Political Management Strategies and Political/Career Relationships: Where Are We Now in the Federal Government?" *Public Administration Review*. 55(3): 263-272.

Lewis, David E. 2007. "Testing Pendleton's Premise: Do Political Appointees Make Worse Bureaucrats"? *The Journal of Politics*. November, pp. 1073-1088.

James P. Pfiffner. 1987. "Political Appointees and Career Executives: The Democracy-Bureaucracy Nexus in the Third Century." *Public Administration Review*. 47(1), The American Constitution and the Administrative State: 57-65.

Richardson, Elliot L., and James P. Pfiffner. 1999. "Politics and Performance: Strengthening the Executive Leadership System." *The Managerial Presidency*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press.

### **12. National Performance Review and the New Public Management**

National Commission on the Public Service. 1989. *Rebuilding the Public Service*. Washington, D.C.

Ronald Moe. 1994. "The "Reinventing Government" Exercise: Misinterpreting the Problem, Misjudging the Consequences." *Public Administration Review*. 54(2): 125-136.

Gilmour, Robert S., and Laura S. Jensen. 1998. "Reinventing Government Accountability: Public Functions, Privatization, and The Meaning of "State Action"." *Public Administration Review*. 58(3): 247-258.

Gore, Al, Jr. 1994. "The New Job of the Federal Executive." *Public Administration Review*. 54(4): 317-321.

Kamensky, John M. 1996. "Role of the "Reinventing Government" Movement in Federal Management Reform." *Public Administration Review*. 56(3): 247-255.

James P. Pfiffner. 1997. "The National Performance Review in Perspective." *International Journal of Public Administration*. 20(1): 41-70.

### **13. The Private Performance of Public Functions (what is inherently governmental?)**

Donald Kettl, *Government by Proxy*

Prager, Jonas. 1994. "Contracting out Government Services: Lessons from the Private Sector." *Public Administration Review*. 54(2): 176-185.

Singer, P.W. 2005. "Outsourcing War." *Foreign Affairs*.

Elliot Sclar, *You Don't Always Get What you Pay For* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

## **14. Policy Making in the Executive Branch**

Graham T. Allison, “Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” *American Political Science Review*, Vo. LXIII, No. 3 (September 1969), pp. 689-718.

Pfiffner, “Presidential Decision Making: Rationality, Advisory Systems, and Personality,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Special issue on presidential decision making. June (2005), pp. 217-228.

Pfiffner, *Power Play: The Bush Administration and the Constitution*, Chapter 6, “The Power to Torture.”

## **15. Presentations of research papers.**

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### **Writing Assignments**

Each written assignment must be submitted in hard copy, but an electronic copy must be submitted in addition so that it can be checked through the School's data base service that surveys published and non-published papers, articles, and books for possible plagiarism. Papers must be written specifically for this course, not recycled from a previous assignment.

In evaluating papers, degree-of-difficulty will be considered. Just as a perfectly executed swan dive may not receive as high a score as a slightly flawed full gainer with a twist, a paper that engages a difficult question or takes a creative approach to a public policy issue will receive more credit than a paper that takes a relatively straight-forward issue and addresses it in a competent, though pedestrian, manner.

Your value-added as a policy professional rests in part on your ability to get beneath the surface of public policy issues. You can only do this if you are familiar with sources that take in-depth approaches to policy problems. Superficial analyses are useful and can be found in newspapers, popular magazines, and policy briefs by think tanks; feel free to use them in your written assignments. But you will find in-depth analysis of public policy issues in scholarly sources. Scholarly sources include books, professional journal articles, government reports, and some think tank pieces. Many public policy journals are available on-line in the GMU library data bases.

Writing is about communication. Brilliant ideas, if not communicated effectively, will not be as influential as they should be. Thus form influences effectiveness; the logic, syntax, grammar, and organization of your papers, as well as their content, will be considered in evaluations.

### **Paper No. 1: An op-ed piece**

Select an interesting issue concerning executive branch policy, organization, or controversy. Write an op-ed essay for the *Washington Post* that explains to a general audience the nature of the issue and why it is important. Take a position on the issue and make a coherent argument about your preferred outcome.

The main difference between this exercise and an actual policy memo is that in this assignment you will full cite your sources. You must cite at least five scholarly sources for your memo: for example, books and scholarly journal articles, think tank pieces (but not policy briefs), government reports, etc. You may also cite newspapers, policy briefs, popular magazines, etc., but they will not count as scholarly sources. In addition, you also must cite at least two of the assignments for this course in your memo.

The paper will be no more than 500 words (two double spaced pages).

### **Paper No. 2: Memorandum to a political superior.**

Assume you are working for the executive branch, Congress, a business firm or non-profit organization that provides services for an executive branch agency. Your superior has asked for a memo on an important issue or controversy concerning executive branch policy, process, or organization. Select an issue upon which your superior must make a decision and explain how he or she will be affected by the outcome of the decision.

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Select a real-life issue drawn from news accounts or the scholarly literature. Advise your superior about the major pros and cons of the position he or she might take on the issue when it arises for decision. State the issue clearly, and present your superior with several options, including the costs and benefits of each. If there are partisan implications of the decision, explain the political context.

The purpose of this exercise is to practice presenting complex material to someone who may have to make a policy decision but who does not have the time to look at the issue as thoroughly as you do. Thus your paper will be no longer than 750 words (three double spaced pages, excluding endnotes, or four pages if you use footnotes).

The main difference between this exercise and an actual policy memo is that in this assignment you will full cite your sources. You must cite at least five scholarly sources for your memo: for example, books and scholarly journal articles, think tank pieces (but not policy briefs), government reports, etc. You may also cite newspapers, policy briefs, popular magazines, etc., but they will not count as scholarly sources. In addition, you also must cite at least two of the assignments for this course in your memo.

### **Paper No. 3: Case Study Research Paper. Due at last class period.**

The purpose of this paper is to give you an opportunity to create an in-depth, scholarly examination of one agency or department in the executive branch. After you select your agency or department, conduct research on the origins of the agency, the political forces that brought about its creation, the major milestones in its existence, and the major controversies surrounding it. Select one major issue, controversy, or policy upon which to focus your analysis and explain why the issue is important and how it will affect the executive branch and the people of the United States. Be sure to:

1. Explain the organizational anatomy of a department and present an organizational overview of its development since its creation. Describe the political and partisan context its creation and its major clientele groups. Describe its roles, functions and missions. Analyze its executive structure, and particularly where political appointees interface with career executives.
2. Explain the major managerial challenges facing the agency. What is the state of its personnel system(s)? Does it contract out important aspects of its mission? What is its relation to the White House staff and the presidency?
3. Choose one of the major challenges facing the department. It could be a policy issue, a managerial issue, or a political challenge. Explain the dynamics of the tensions that led to this challenge. How did it develop historically? Is there a partisan dimension to the challenge? How is the agency dealing with the challenge and what is the likely outcome?  
what is the present state of the challenge. How should the president and/or Congress deal with this challenge.

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It is important to consult a variety of scholarly sources, government documents, think tank analyses, etc. in order to bring solid research to bear on your topic. You may not write on the same topic as you wrote about in your op-ed piece or memo. The paper should be about 25 pages in length, double spaced.

A one page written proposal for the paper is required by mid-semester.

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## Analytical Writing

The following is a distillation of more than a quarter century of teaching and evaluating analytical writing. Much of it may sound obvious, but experience has taught me that it is easy to lose sight of simple rules.

For purposes of scholarly writing it is important to write analytically. Analytic writing is more than merely describing what others have said or describing institutions of government or public policy making (though description is often an essential aspect of analysis). Your paper should not be merely a listing of many interesting facts about topic X, but rather a coherent analysis of X from a particular point of view.

In **analysis** you are asking and answering questions about the causes and consequences of whatever you are examining.

You are seeking explanations for behavior.

You are developing categories and frameworks that will help us understand political behavior or policy and you may want to generalize insights from one case to other cases.

Ask the question: Of what is this an instance?

## **In Writing an Essay, Remember:**

The introduction should say what the paper is about and how you will approach the topic.

The paper should address one central question and have a thesis.

The paper should be organized logically, with an evident structure.

The reader should be told how each part of the paper is related to the other parts..

Use subheadings to label different sections.

Outline your paper after it is written to see if it flows logically.

Proofread your paper for spelling and syntax.

Be sure to cite all of your sources and use quotation marks when you use another's words. **Plagiarism is using another's words or ideas without giving proper credit.** Plagiarism is a major scholarly sin; it is unethical, dishonest, and deceptive, and it has ended some people's careers. It can easily be avoided by giving credit where credit is due.

## **Professional Presentations for Public Administration Students**

Oral presentations are an essential component of the skill set of any public policy professional. And the only way to prepare yourself for public speaking is to practice; that is why presentations are required in my classes. Most often these are short presentations of about ten minutes. The following are some hints to help make your presentation most effective.

### **Professional demeanor and dress:**

The assignment should be taken seriously, and dress should be appropriate. Do not wear jeans or t-shirts; your clothes should project professionalism. Stand up straight and look at your audience; glance down at your notes when you need to. Do not talk down to your notes; project your voice to the back of your audience. Try to speak slowly and articulate clearly. Prepare your talk. Go over your remarks sufficiently so that you are thoroughly familiar with the material.

### **Do NOT read your essay:**

Speak from an outline; and use your notes effectively by glancing down at them when necessary. Essays composed to be read are less effective when heard aurally. Speak in your own voice and explain your ideas in your own words. Tell us about it; don't read it to us.

### **Power Point:**

You may use Power Point if it helps you present your ideas more effectively; e.g., for illustrations, diagrams, data, charts, graphs, or an outline. Do NOT put your talk on power point slides, and do NOT read from the slides.

### **Organize your remarks:**

In your introduction, frame the issue you are addressing and present a brief overview of your remarks. Make sure the audience knows the main point of your talk so they can listen more effectively. Organize your talk in a logical manner and ensure that the audience knows how the separate parts fit together.

### **Checklist:**

- Dress professionally
- Speak from an outline
- Provide an introductory overview
- Look at the audience and project to the back
- Do not read from Power Point slides
- Organize your talk effectively
- Conclude with a brief summary of your main points

## About the Authors



**James P. Pfiffner** is University Professor in the School of Public Policy at George Mason University. His major areas of expertise are the Presidency, American National Government, and Public Administration. He has written or edited twelve books on the presidency and American national government, including *Power Play: The Bush Administration and the Constitution* (Brookings 2008).

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