PADM 6025 INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Spring 2020

Wednesday 9:00-11:50AM
Wooten Hall 214

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Course Description:

The goal of this course is to provide graduate students a survey of theory and research on institutions and governance; and for students to develop research skills for institutional analysis research in public administration and related disciplines. We will cover materials on institutional emergence, design, evolution and change, and how institutions influence policy and management processes, decisions and outcomes. This syllabus will be updated periodically.

Requirements:

- Participants must come to seminar prepared to discuss the readings critically and actively participate in class.
- Students will prepare and submit paper assignments that include a research design and a final paper that will carry out this research design and report the findings in the form of a journal article manuscript.

Recommended Texts:


Most papers assigned are available in electronic form.

Canvas will be used to supplement work in this course. Checking canvas frequently is advised in order to stay abreast of any and all announcements, and changes. On occasion, the professor will send emails to the entire class via UNT student assigned email accounts.

**Participation:**

Think of our weekly seminar like a staff meeting in terms of your participation.

You are expected to come with reading done thoughtfully and prepared to discuss it so that we can understand its content and implications. Merely describing what you have read is minimally acceptable graduate work. Identifying strengths and weaknesses in a study, presenting competing alternatives or evidence, and laying out a reading’s implications for policy, governing, or management are the skills that differentiate excellent from ordinary discussion.

Your roles as graduate students in this class are as follows:

**Readings:** Everyone must read the materials. We will have two (2) presentations each class. When assigned a weekly reading, you will present to the class up to five (5) PowerPoint slides. The presentation (not including questions and answers) should take no more than ten (15) minutes. Do not read any part of your presentation- practice your presentation until you can make it without notes. Make sure to tell us why the paper is important (from an explanatory and theory development basis) and be critical - tell us what is good and bad about the paper.

**Final Papers:**

There are three (3) interrelated paper assignments.

The first is a short essay that specifies your research question and argues for its potential contribution and significance for research and practice (due on before Week 2 - January 22).

The second is a research design that uses a regression model-based approach to test hypotheses drawn from one or more theories of institutions and identifies the causal elements in the model and methods for testing the model, including
describing appropriate data and measures (due on or before Week 10 - March 18).

For the final assignment you will carry out the design, conduct your empirical analysis, findings, discussion, and conclusion (due on/before Week 15- April 22).

To obtain a passing grade this paper will need to be approximately 25 pages in length, reflect your best work, and be suitable for submission to a refereed journal. The criterion is that it would be sent out for review not “desk rejected” if submitted to Public Administration Review. Late papers are accepted with great prejudice. The final paper will be presented and defended in class.

The final paper will be a quantitative regression-based paper.

Class Participation:

Participation will include contributions to class discussions, exercises (such as the submission of research questions for the first class) and presentations of core and individual readings and your final paper. Participants must come to seminar prepared to discuss the readings critically. You will be expected to ask relevant questions and participate in discussion with the speakers. Students attending class sessions but not making constructive contributions to class discussions will get a zero for participation.

Examination:

The final exam will be a mock qualifying exam. It is a closed-book, in-class exam. You will choose two of three comprehensive and integrative questions and have 3 hours to complete your answers.

Grading:

The grade for the course will be determined as follows:

- Participation (core/individual readings) 10%
- Paper Reviewer 10%
- Final Exam 30%
- Research Paper:
  - Research Question Essay 5%
  - Research Design 15%
  - Presentation 5%
  - Final Paper 25%

Grades Breakdown:

A=100–90%  B=89–80%  C=79–70%  D=69–60%  F= 59% below

Withdraws:

Students may withdraw from the course, but you must follow university procedures. The instructor is not responsible for failure to meet withdrawal deadlines.

Student Perception of Teaching (SPOT):

Students are strongly encouraged to complete the Student Perception of Teaching (SPOT) survey. This short survey will be made available on-line at the end of the semester.

Assistance:

The Department of Public Administration, in cooperation with the Office of Disability Accommodation, complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should (1) register with and provide documentation to the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA); and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during regular working hours before the 12th class day of regular semesters (4th class day of summer sessions).

Acceptable Student Behavior:

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor’s ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at www.unt.edu/csrr

Policy On Cheating and Plagiarism:

Notice of this policy shall be given in all public administration classes each semester, and written copies shall be available in the public administration departmental office.
Definitions:

The UNT Code of Student Conduct and Discipline defines cheating and plagiarism "as the use of unauthorized books, notes, or otherwise securing help in a test; copying other's tests, assignments, reports, or term papers; representing the work of another as one's own; collaborating without authority with another student during an examination or in preparing academic work; or otherwise practicing scholastic dishonesty."

Penalties:

Normally, the minimum penalty for cheating or plagiarism is a grade of "F" in the course. In the case of graduate departmental exams, the minimum penalty shall be failure of all fields of the exam. Determination of cheating or plagiarism shall be made by the instructor in the course, or by the departmental faculty in the case of departmental exams.

Cases of cheating or plagiarism on graduate departmental exams, papers, theses, or dissertations shall automatically be referred to the departmental Curriculum and Degree Programs Committee. Cases of cheating or plagiarism in ordinary course work may, at the discretion of the instructor, be referred to the Curriculum and Degree Program[s] Committee in the case of either graduate or undergraduate students. This committee, acting as an agent of the Department, shall impose further penalties, or recommend further penalties to the Dean of Students, if they determine that the case warrants it. In all cases, the Dean of Students shall be informed in writing of the case.

Appeals:

Students may appeal any decision under this policy by following the procedures laid down in the UNT Code of Student Conduct and Discipline. [Adopted 1977, revised 1993]
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Week 1  **Overview of Assignments, Final Paper, and Performance Expectations** 1/15

During this introduction session, after we review the course, core/individual readings, assignments and expectations, we will assign student presentations on individual readings.

Week 2  **Theoretical Approaches for Structuring Institutional Analysis** 1/22

Students will discuss possible research questions for their paper with the class for feedback.


Week 3  **Public and Rational Choice Theory** 1/29

The main argument is that political actors' rational choices are constrained. They are boundedly rational. Institutions are formal and informal rules governing the behaviors between individuals; and that, actions are made based on individual self-interest.


**Week 4** **New Institutional Economics 2/5**

An economic perspective that extends the principles of economics to understand social and legal norms and rules (which are institutions) in explaining economic activities. Institutions are the “rules of the game,” both the formal and informal rules that govern individual behavior and structure social interactions (institutional frameworks). Noted that institutions are also “nested” inside other broader institutional frameworks.


**Week 5  Historical and Sociological Institutionalism 2/12**

Historical institutionalism suggests “history matters.” A key concept is “path dependency,” i.e., the existence of an institution that was designed early on have an inherent agenda, both informal (norms, conventions) and formal (laws, regulations). Few sociological institutionalism key concepts are “logic of appropriateness,” “isomorphism,” and “institutional embeddedness.”


**Week 6  Political Science and Political Institutions 2/19**

Institutions are important because they can shape the power structure, resources, and policy preferences of political actors. Subsequently, institutions produce certain policy outcomes. What factors explain political institutions? Why do they take certain forms?

Week 7 Fire Alarms and Police Patrols 2/26

To understand the logic of this concept, we need to examine what are meant by democratic dilemma, models of oversights, and effectiveness.


**Week 8  Old and New Institutionalism 3/4**

The study of institutions aims to understand how institutions influence human behavior through formal and informal rules. What are the main contributions of new institutionalism? How have the various theoretical lenses contributed to our understanding and solutions to the wicked problems of public administration?

**Week 9  Spring Break  3/11**

**Week 10  “Reforming the Bureaucracy” -- to what and for whom? 3/18**


**Week 11  Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD)/ Extensions**


Week 12  **Institutional Collective Action Framework**  
With emphasis on “Regional Governance and Institutional Arrangements”


Regionalism” *Urban Affairs Review.*
https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087418773905

**Week 13 Formation of Local Governments and Neighborhood Institutions**


Week 14  Bureaucratic and Intergovernmental Delegation


Week 15  Institutions and Behavioral Public Administration


Week 16  Research Presentations & Paper Reviewer/Discussants

Week 17  Final Exam
Focus on theoretical interest rather than on substantive area
Your research should focus on something that is theoretically interesting and not on a substantive area. A theory is about “why” and “how” something happens. For example, assuming I am doing a study on shelters in a disaster area. Rather than focusing on the shelter per se, what is theoretically interesting is really about shelter choice among households (or about the strategic decision-making of households during a disaster). The rational choice theory assumes households to be boundedly rational and will select a shelter that can minimize the costs of re-adaptation. So, I am interested in the motivation of households to choose one type of shelter over another.

However, I could test the rational choice theory on other substantive areas such as resettlement choice, or whether households will participate in rescue efforts, or a decision on NGOs assistance to disaster victims, or why households might not seek medical attention when suffering from psychological stress etc. The point here is that, I made a deliberate decision to study the problem (and apply the theory) in a specific context or substantive area i.e., shelter.

Major sections: Budget your writing accordingly
A research paper should have the following sections: “Abstract,” “Introduction,” “Background/Theoretical Framework,” “Research Design/Data Collection,” “Results/Analysis,” and “Implications/Conclusion.”

Although the structure for a research paper is pretty standard, your section on “Background/Theoretical Framework” should be written somewhat different. You should try to make the title interesting and informative---something that would signal a clear/key theoretical issue being studied. For example, referring back to the previous example, I would have written the section as “Household Shelter Choice: Public Building Versus Private Home” or something along that line. I would also have two sub-sections where I specify the different types of shelter and discuss their associated risks. This way I can develop a specific hypothesis and make predictions (based on the theory) on the behavior of households. My task is to illustrate, given the different choice of shelters, what explains/motivates households to choose one shelter over the other.

Introduction Section
Write 3 – 4 paragraphs. The first paragraph should introduce the problem/issue (substantive area) you are studying. The second paragraph explains the theoretical debate i.e., how they might explain the issue/problem. The third paragraph must
present your main argument and explain how that argument can resolve/answer your research question/problem/issue. Be sure to explain why and how your research can make contribution to the field of public management.

The last paragraph informs the reader what the paper is all about, but this time you need to be specific about your theory and the main objective of the paper. It should provide a road-map for the reader. It says something like, “In this paper, a theory of rational choice is used to examine shelter choice among households affected by the 2005 Tsunami in South India. This paper is organized in the following ways…,” or something along this line. Note that you are not writing a spy novel, so it is okay to tell the reader what you have found.

**Theoretical Framework/Literature Section**

In this section, you need to tease out or discuss the main components of the theory (or theories) and then specify your hypotheses. The existing literature is supposed to help you develop your main arguments. One of the most frustrating aspects of reading student projects is that there is a tendency to summarize the literature rather than integrate the materials in a way that is cohesive and logical. You are not writing an annotated bibliography, so please do not provide a laundry list of citations and statements about what others found in some sort of annoying ways. You should be presenting a theory that explains the problem you are studying and develop your hypotheses (hopefully one that is testable) based on the chosen framework or theory. Once again, I cannot overemphasize this point: The existing literature is supposed to help you develop your main arguments.

The best way to handle this section is to ask a set of questions.

This is probably the best time to think about how you should write a decent paragraph (also read Newell and Durst on “Tips on writing from the PADM faculty”). There is no specific rule but, in my humble opinion, there seems to be an art to writing a paragraph:

i. Begin your paragraph with a clear statement/argument and then develop it carefully. A sentence should be about 17 – 19 words maximum. Beyond that, you will lose your reader (read: the instructor). Avoid one sentence paragraphs, you are not writing poetry; avoid abstract writing, you are not Virginia Woolf or James Joyce.

ii. The second sentence should provide an example to clarify your main point. You can also write another sentence to reinforce your main argument with a few citations. A quotation is acceptable but should be limited to only one or two direct phrases. This can strengthen your argument. In the beginning of the first or second sentence, try to avoid the words “this,” “this is,” “there is,”
“there are,” or “it is.” Be clear on “who” is acting on “what”? For example, by simply saying “a household” may be too vague, so you might want to consider “poor households” or “female-headed households.”

iii. In the third or fourth sentence, be sure to link your argument to the “so what?” question. At the minimum, you need to inform the reader why/how the point you are making is important. Here, you need to be careful with your choice of words. Avoid conversational expressions! And be specific with the causal mechanism or drivers.

iv. Make sure you edit and re-edit your paragraphs (several times) by getting rid of meaningless words and unnecessary sentences. Do not make the same point twice unless you can highlight the different causal mechanisms in the following paragraph. In short, redundancy needs to be avoided.

v. Be sure to use some transitional phrases, clauses, or sentences to create a bridge from one paragraph to the next. You could use the transitional clauses such as “however,” “for the most part,” “moreover” etc., but try to use them strategically.

vi. Be humble in your writing and try to use conditional clauses if need be. A couple of examples can illustrate this point:
   a. “The risks of government policy and re-settlement programs having unexpected consequences [or side effects] can be strongly reduced if local officials receiving reliable information about the likely impacts [of its programs] can translate them into policy actions. However, [the effort] is often difficult to achieve [for several administrative reasons]”
   b. “Depending on the socio-economic characteristics of a household, the preferences of poor households differ considerably on shelter choice.”

Research Design/Data Collection Section
This is perhaps the weakest part of most students’ work. You need to inform the readers of the nuts and bolts of your dataset.

i. You must have a paragraph or two describing your sample selection or site selection. You must explain the rationale behind your selections. For example, what is your unit of analysis? i.e., countries, states, individuals, organizations, city, county etc. Where did you send the surveys? Who responded? What is the usable sample size? How did you conduct the sample selection? Did you face selection bias problems? What techniques have you used to resolve the problems? How can you be sure that those responded to the surveys are not mostly from the wealthy households?

ii. How did you measure or operationalize each variable? For example, budget two or three paragraphs on your dependent variable. Explain the substantive interpretation of your dependent variable by either illustrating a mathematical
example or through some concrete “real-life” examples. Why did you choose that particular variable to operationalize the concept?

iii. Similar logic applies to your main independent and control variables (though a detailed write-up is not necessary for the control variables). But, they have to be based on the theory developed in the previous section. You also need to state whether the independent variables will have a positive or negative effect on the dependent variable i.e., what do your hypotheses predict about the coefficients?

iv. For your statistical analysis, try to avoid technical jargon or terms that are too technical for non-quantitative folks to understand. You want to write this section in English. You are not writing the paper for statisticians or methodologists.

v. In saying that, you could (this is optional) specify your statistical model (or regression equation(s)). Though, you do need to explain how the model is estimated (OLS, robust standard errors, multinomial logit, probit, or Tobit etc.). Depending on the level of sophistication of your model, it is sufficient to write one or two sentences if your model is already well known in the literature. If you use a complex modeling technique, be ready to write your explanation in English.

vi. You should provide a table that summarizes all the variables i.e., a table that lists the variables names (avoid using acronyms or abbreviations), their means, and something about their dispersion, minimum, and maximum. You probably want to tell the reader where you get the data, i.e., if your source is from the government census, which year? Sometimes, you may need to provide a table with the correlation coefficients analysis.

**Results/Analysis Section**
The results section is where you report your main findings, present tables, explain coefficients etc. Be as thorough and complete as possible but avoid simply writing which variables are significant and reporting their relationships. You need to explain your results not list them.

i. The first paragraph should summarize the general findings. You could also talk about the diagnostic or other data analyses that can persuade the readers of your general findings.

ii. For the effect of the main independent variable, work through the hypothesis. Use some hypothetical examples—instead of saying a unit increase in X will lead to an increase in Y by , find an alternative way to communicate that to the readers in a meaningful way. Really unpack your results without being too technical.

iii. When presenting your tables or figures, make sure the tables or figures can explain the results on their own. In other words, a reader should be able to
look at the tables/figures and quickly tell what’s going on without reading the main text. Provide the reader with a title that is informative. If your analysis is based on a logistic regression model, it is always a good idea to calculate the first coefficient as factor change (log-odds or predicted probability) by showing how that number is derived and then explain its substantive meaning.

iv. When presenting your tables, you need to report the coefficients, standard errors, t-score, or p-values. You can add stars as well, i.e., *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01. You should report R-square and adjusted R-square (if you used OLS), F-value, and sample size. Similar requirements are expected if you have multiple models on the same dataset. If you use logistic regression, be aware that the interpretation of pseudo-R square is not the same as R-square in OLS.

v. In your main text, always explain what your table is trying to tell the reader. For example, you could write: “Column 1 of Table 5 lists the eight types of shelter. Columns 2 through 4 provide the mean values of perceived costs that households confronted when seeking shelters. The mean differences between the perceived costs are presented in the last three columns. The results indicate that ….”

vi. When presenting your figures, make sure you label the x-axis, y-axis, and the contents of the figure clearly. If you use bar chart, always report the frequency and percentages. If you are using a logistic regression model and need to present the predicted probability, you may want to tell the reader that “Figure 1 derived from the estimated reported in Table 2” etc.

Implications/Conclusion
This is your last chance to make your case.

i. Be sure to discuss the intellectual merit and the broader impact of your research.

ii. What are the general implications of your findings, especially for your theory and for practice? For example, explain to the readers what you have learned about shelter choice and what have we learned about the strategic behavior of households during disasters more generally? Have your results supported your theory? Do your results suggest we need to modify the theory?

iii. What are the limitations of your research and how would you suggest we should move forward in this line of research?

Abstract
You should answer each of following questions without using too much jargon (Abstract should be between 150 and 200 words).

i. What is the problem that you are examining? i.e., something that is theoretically interesting in a particular/substantive area.

ii. What is your main argument (or theory used to explain the problem)?
iii. What is the scope of your research? i.e., sample population, methods of analysis, period of study, and/or data source etc.
iv. What is/are your general finding(s)?
v. What are the implications of your finding(s)?

References
Use the American Psychological Association (APA) style or the Modern Language Association (MLA) style

Final Advice:
i. Don’t forget page numbering
ii. Write your name in order to claim your work
iii. My methods professor, Dr. Carsey, suggested that we should model our paper after the best papers we have read in top journals.
iv. Another wise professor, Dr. Scholz, suggested that we should start a paragraph with a simple sentence and then elaborate our thought from there.