

EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
WRITTEN PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION
POLICIES AND STUDY QUESTIONS

Section I – Policies and Procedures

A. Preliminary Examination Policies

All MPA students must successfully pass the written MPA preliminary examination. The purpose of this examination is to demonstrate student competency in the fundamental concepts of the curriculum covered in the core courses.

A student is eligible to take the examination after advancement to candidacy and the completion of at least 27 hours of graduate study. It is recommended that students take this examination at or near the completion of the core courses. The written examination is given once each semester and once in the summer.

The written examination is given in a five-hour block of time. Each student must answer four questions: one question from Part I of the exam and three questions from Part II. Part I questions deal with the theories and concepts of public administration addressed in Administration, Ethics, and Public Policy and Public Sector Organizations and Management. Part II contains a series of questions on Administrative or Municipal Law, Public Finance, Human Resource Management and Research Methods and Policy Analysis and Evaluation.

The written examinations are graded individually by each member of the PA faculty, and then a pass or fail decision is made collectively by the PA faculty. Students must receive a passing grade of 75 or better on all questions in order to pass the exam. A student can fail one question, in which case he or she will be asked to rewrite the question in some form. If a student fails two questions, the PA faculty will decide whether the student must rewrite particular questions or must rewrite the entire exam. This decision will be based on the overall strength of the exam. If the student fails more than one question and is asked to rewrite the entire exam, he or she may not do so until the next scheduled exam. If a student fails the exam a second time, he or she may petition the graduate faculty to be permitted to take the exam for a third time.

STUDENTS WILL BE ASKED TO CITE RELEVANT LITERATURE IN ANSWERING EVERY QUESTION! ! Please come prepared to do that in each area of the exam.

B. General Guidelines for Preparing for the MPA Comprehensive Exam

The comprehensive examinations are the MPA program's vehicle for finding out whether you are able to apply the material you have studied to questions about public

administration theory and practice. As you study, you are encouraged to seek linkages among the content covered in the various core classes, so that you can build some reasonably general and integrated models of public administration. An integrated picture of the subject should enable you to answer the questions by applying informed and relevant ideas and literature about cause and effect, strategies and methods, priorities and issues, and ethical concerns. These study questions are intended to help you anticipate and prepare to meet this expectation. The questions are not necessarily the ones that will be asked on the examination, but they do cover the same subject matter and issues that the faculty considers particularly important.

Some of the questions may refer to specific reading materials that were used in particular classes you did not take. The faculty understands that specific materials vary from course to course. Allowances are made for this both by giving students choices among questions and in the grading of the answers. The questions will still concern basic issues and concepts, and you should not ignore those issues simply because you have not read a particular book or article that is mentioned.

In general, performance on these examinations is directly related to how enthusiastically and carefully students study and prepare. Put as much time into preparation as you can. In general the faculty feel the student can benefit from participating in work groups and students are encouraged to do so. You can also benefit from seeking help from your professors and asking them questions to clarify things you don't understand is a natural part of the process.

Your ability to cite specific literature, legal cases, and case studies will be considered important evidence of your full understanding. More generally, it will be considered a strength if your answers demonstrate understanding of the linkages among the different subfields of public administration -- for example the linkage between human resources management and the legal environment of public administration; or the relationship between human resources management and the broader issues of organization design and management.

Answers are also more impressive when they show some sophistication about contingencies. For example, money does motivate people *under certain conditions* -- what conditions? Defined contributions have trade-offs that make them more attractive for some types of employees; less for others -- which ones will want what? "Decentralization" and "deregulation" have trade-offs too; What are the pros and cons of creating more discretion for public managers? And so forth.

C. Grading Process and Notification

The entire MPA core faculty grade all comprehensive exams.

Study Questions

Questions focused on organizations, management, public policy, administration & ethics:

1. Questions focused on organizations, management, public policy, administration & ethics:

1. According to the literature, what particular kinds of problems, issues, and constraints do managers in the public and non-profit sectors have to confront in conducting basic management processes - e.g., in budgeting, planning and decision-making, managing human resources, designing and organizing work, leading and implementing organizational change, and participating effectively in policy-making and political processes? *How do these constraints vary with the type of agency or program and with levels of government, and what can they do to overcome these constraints? Review what Hal Rainey has to say about what makes public organizations and their environments distinctive, and how it affects their approaches to the management processes already listed.*
- 1a. *Under what conditions is rational decision-making possible in public organizations? (What is rational decision-making, anyway?) How and why can public sector decision-making be something different from an ideal rational model? What can managers and policy-makers do to attempt to control the effects of irrational or chaotic processes? Remember "Groupthink?" Remember "incremental budgeting?"*
2. Do public sector managers have to participate in the policy making process? Why? How? Isn't it the manager's job to just implement policies made by elected officials? Why do they have to be involved in policy-making and what kinds of skills and resources do they need to develop? Who are the different theorists who have discussed this and what do they argue? Do you agree or disagree?
3. Much has been said in recent years about the bloated growth and hopeless inefficiency of government and public agencies. (By the way, what would you say if we asked you to assess that point of view?) It is particularly worrisome since there have been so many efforts to "reform" public agencies and their oversight and management processes. Could you outline and assess the most important of those reform efforts? The reasoning behind them? Their presumed pros and cons? Civil Service Systems? The 1978 Civil Service Reform Act? Privatization and outsourcing initiatives? The National Performance Review? *The impact of 9/11?* What have the Public Administration theorists said about these reforms? *Is the "new public administration" the answer? How so; how not?*
- 3a. *Can public organizations innovate and change? Do they have to be forced to do so? How and why do they do it? What are some strategies, tactics, and tools they can use to manage change? What are some they should probably avoid? Can you give some examples of successful change efforts in the public sector?*
4. Suppose we were to hit you with a case problem and ask how you would handle it? Would you be ready? Think about ethical issues, human resource problems

- and public policy analysis in terms of how you would deal with them in various situations. In essence, can you apply the theories and concepts you have studied in courses? Can you link theorists' names with their theories?
5. Explain in a reasonably complete way, and within the constraints of available time, how the legal environment affects public agencies and managers and conditions what they do? Explain the role of legislation (e.g., the Administrative Procedures Act; sunshine and sunset laws; etc), and of litigation and oversight by the courts (court cases, etc.)? Draw examples from your studies in administrative law, human resources, public policy and political process, finance and budgeting, or research methodology and cite the relevant literature.
 6. What are the various leadership theories that have developed concerning leadership. According to your research and coursework, what are some of the characteristics of an effective leader? What is the difference between a manager and a leader? What are some of the characteristics of an effective leader? What would Stivers say about some of these characteristics and assumptions of leadership?
 7. How do we define structure in organization theory and why is it important? If you were organizing a public agency, what are some of the factors you would consider in determining the structure of the agency? Be sure to explain what the research has found regarding agency structure and the environment. What role, if any would gender play in the structure of an organization?
 8. What is the basic concept behind the classical theory in public administration? Who are the classical theorists and what are some of their arguments? What led to the rise of other theories/schools such as human behavior and contingency? Describe the theorists and ideas associated with the various schools. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach?
 9. According to the literature and your personal experiences how does the environment impact a public organization? Include the influence of the environment on the organization's values, leadership, management, and decision making. Be able to provide relevant examples as to how public managers can effectively manage their environment. Discuss the various actors in the environment that affect public organizations and the policy process. Be sure to explain the level of impact they have, why they are able to influence public agencies and the policy process, and how effective public managers can deal with these actors?
 10. Scholars have long debated the precise purpose and scope of public administration. They have argued about whether and to what extent public administration and politics are separate concepts. Practitioners, on the other hand, rarely worry about these matters. They know what Max Weber and Woodrow Wilson said, and most agree: "it ain't true." Write an essay that describes the

- environment in which public administrators must work. (You may address public administrators at the local, state, or national level, or you may choose to write generally about the environment). Focus on the following: nature of, and problems with bureaucratic organizations; political and administrative barriers to efficiency and effectiveness; and modes of public decision-making. Attempt, in each case, to be prescriptive. That is, given a particular problem or obstacle, what might an intelligent, creative (and lucky, perhaps) public administrator do to improve the odds of success? Be sure to cite literature and include your analysis.
11. Public administrators must understand how public policy is developed, implemented, and evaluated. They must also understand barriers to policy-making. Describe the ways in which policy gets made (or sometimes fails to be made); and describe the nature of and potential problems with policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. **Use a substantive example of a policy in your discussion of the key policy issues above.**
 12. Be prepared to write an essay that discusses ethical challenges, ethical guidelines and ethical decision-making for public administrators. Be specific about the ways in which public administration is or should be guided by ethical considerations. Briefly describe any typical ethical issue which a public or nonprofit administrator is likely to face. Then discuss administrative ethics by answering briefly all of the following questions :
 - a) What are the most important ethical principles involved?
 - b) To what extent are these principles likely to affect you as an administrator?
 - c) How would you have handled this situation and why?
 - d) To what extent does this case illustrate conflicts between administrative ethics and democratic values?
 - e) How useful are the guidelines in the ASPA code of ethics and similar codes in dealing with an issue like this one?
 13. Be familiar with the major issues in the field of public administration and the theorists who are associated with those issues (remember the *Handbook of PA*?). Can you trace the development of those issues and how they have evolved? Why are these issues so significant? How do they play out in public administration today? How do they fit into the American political culture and values?
 14. Be familiar with the basic schools of thought introduced in 801 and 875 (classical, human behavior, contingency, etc.). For each school be able to identify and explain: the major ideas behind each school, the theorists associated with them, and the strengths and weaknesses of each of them. Be able to articulate the relevance of these schools to public administration practitioners today.
 15. How would you define ethics? Discuss the individual and environmental characteristics that influence ethical decision making? What is guerrilla government? As a public manager, what are some things that you can do to create and ethical environment?

16. Be familiar with Goodsell's *A Cases for Bureaucracy*. Point by point explain his main arguments and the evidence he offers to support them. Do you agree or disagree? How does this work fit into the overall context of PA – i.e. what would other leading theorists say about his argument?
17. Describe the basic principles and values of bureaucracy and the scholars associated with these ideas. What are the characteristics, according to the literature, of an effective public manager? Explain how organizations are fundamentally masculine in nature? What gender dilemmas does this create in the workforce?
18. Do public sector managers have to participate in policy making processes? Why? How? Isn't it the manager's job to just implement policies made by elected officials? Why do they have to be involved in policy-making and what kinds of skills and resources do they need to develop? Who are the different theorists who have discussed this and what do they argue? Do you agree or disagree?
19. What are the various leadership theories that have developed concerning leadership? According to your research and coursework, what are some of the characteristics of an effective leader? What is the difference between a manager and a leader? What are some of the characteristics of an effective leader? What would Stivers say about some of these characteristics and assumptions of leadership?
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 - d) To what extent does this case illustrate conflicts between administrative ethics and democratic values?
 - e) How useful are the guidelines in the ASPA code of ethics and similar codes in dealing with an issue like this one?

Questions focused on human resources:

1. Review the changing social, economic, and political context of HR management in the public sector. How have "globalization," changing demographics, work-related culture and behavior, increasing social diversity, advancing technology, and the

"free-market" economy of the U.S. affected HR issues and their management? Be able to relate these factors to policy dilemmas and trade-offs in such applied areas as employment policies and regulations (Civil Service, at-will, etc.), workforce planning, recruitment and selection, affirmative action, training and workforce development, and compensation and benefits.

2. Review the development of "reform" policies and practices in the public sector. This would encompass traditional Civil Service systems, attempts to modify and improve them, reactions against them in the late 20th century, and subsequent alternative policies, including de-regulation and streamlining initiatives, and scaling back of Civil Service systems and their protections. Be able to relate these developments to their larger political and social context -- e.g., the particular slant of business thinking of the times, and programs and practices such as "reinvention" and the National Performance Review, outsourcing and privatization, and devolution of the administrative state. Be able to identify and explain specific methods associated with Civil Service systems and deregulated approaches (how does one "streamline" HR management, etc.), and be able to compare and contrast the different approaches in terms of hurdles and opportunities, pros and cons, and impacts. This includes the informal side -- how the approaches can be manipulated or "gamed." It has been said of the newer, more decentralized and streamlined approaches that they require the participants to be competent and well-intentioned. Can you explain what this means?
3. While "reform" thinking has been evolving, so has the understanding of Affirmative Action and equal employment opportunity. Do you remember the difference between these two concepts? Can you explain the development of Affirmative Action -- the basic laws, who is protected and how, and how the concept has changed in law and practice over the years? (The Equal Pay Act, Civil Rights Act of 1964 and 1972 amendments; Age Discrimination in Employment Act; Americans With Disabilities Act; Family and Medical Leave Act; etc.) Can you trace the development of important litigation in this area, and explain how the thinking of the Courts and the legal profession have developed and changed -- e.g., regarding concepts such as job relatedness, reverse discrimination, permissible and impermissible preferences in testing and hiring, or employer liability for sexual harassment. Do you remember what Bona Fide Occupational Qualifications are and why they are important? What about quid pro quo and hostile climate sexual harassment? Conditional job offers? Can you summarize management's responsibilities in these areas? What are some of the important and sound practices and policies they must use to meet their obligations -- in testing and interviewing, for example, or in sexual harassment policies, or with regard to workforce planning?
4. Another area of concern that has long tormented public sector managers is compensation and its relationship to motivation. Can you contrast general strategies of compensation, such as traditional point-factor approaches and innovations such as broad-banding or skills-based pay? Can you identify and

explain specific options for using compensation to reward and/or motivate employees (both pay and benefits), explain some of the experiments that have been attempted with these options, and explain what became of them and why? Do you remember expectancy theory? Any problems with expectancy theory? Which is more "fair" and why: merit pay or merit bonuses? (If you are on your toes, you will recognize this as a trick question.) If an elected official tells you he or she wants to adopt a merit pay system to encourage greater motivation and productivity among public employees, what goes through your mind; how might you reason with this person?

5. Yet another area of concern for public managers that has exploded into a major contemporary dilemma is policy and administration regarding employee benefits. At one and the same time, there is pressure to provide more and more varied benefits while containing costs and meeting obligations. Can you explain this paradox with details -- how and why it has developed; what specific options are being considered or used to address it; how it relates to the attractiveness of public sector employment, and to employee motivation? Do you remember the difference between defined-contribution and defined-benefit retirement systems? HMOs, PPOs, HSAs, HRAs? Wellness programs and EAPs? Family friendly and "cafeteria" benefits? Unfunded liability? Business executives on the Kentucky Blue Ribbon Commission on State Retirement Systems recently suggested that the state shift to 401k retirement plans for employees -- good idea? Bad idea? How? Why?
6. Review the basic tool kit of human resources, be able to explain current general practices and issues, at least in general terms, and look for linkages with more general organization theory and management. For example:
 - a. What are the ideals of performance appraisal processes and performance management and why does practice tend to fall short of the ideals? What is the difference between developmental and evaluative appraisal and why does it matter?
 - b. How have changes in technology (and especially information technology) impacted human resources management and practice in recent decades? (Look at such issues as recruitment and selection, record-keeping and analysis, and employees rights and privacy.)
 - c. What are some of the important techniques and instrumentation that can help you improve validity in testing, and accomplish more effective recruitment and selection?
 - d. Review privatization and contracting out, and try to sort out the issues that apply specifically to public sector human resources from other more general issues.

- e. What employee rights must you respect and protect; what limits are there on employee rights, particularly in the public sector? Free expression? Free association? Privacy? Searches and seizures? Remember "safety sensitive" positions and compelling public interest? Property interest and liberty interest in jobs? What basic alternatives are available for administering discipline? What basic options to managers have for organizing and administering the disciplinary process? What rights do employees have to due process, equitable treatment, and protection against unreasonable treatment?
- f. Is safety an important issue for the public sector? Okay, dumb question -- so for whom is it particularly important in the public sector, and how, and why? And how can failure in this area be costly, and what can be done about that? How do OSHA and workers compensation link to your budget!? What can you do to protect your budget?

Questions focused on methodology and program evaluation

1. You are working for the Cabinet for Families and Children and one of your jobs is to administer the "Kentucky Good Parenting Program." This is a program that provides parenting training for families at risk. Families at risk is defined as any or all of the following:
 - families receiving TANF (welfare), food stamps, or WIC (infant food program);
 - incarcerated parent or parents;
 - families referred by the court for any reason;
 - families referred by social workers for any reason.

You have been asked to evaluate the program. Detail all the steps you would take. In answering this question, be sure you incorporate the following elements and CITE RELEVANT LITERATURE:

1. A logical progression of all necessary steps;
 2. Acknowledgement of problems/barriers to effective program evaluation and possible solutions or satisficing solutions;
 3. Discussion of the research design;
 4. Discussion of the variables for which you would collect data;
 5. Discussion of the statistical techniques you might use to analyze the data.
2. Often researchers analyzing policy or programs discuss the statistical significance of their findings. What does "statistical significance" mean? What is the role of statistical significance in policy and program evaluation? When is it appropriate? When is it not appropriate? What are the strengths and weaknesses of relying on statistical significance in making policy recommendations? CITE LITERATURE

3. When policy analysts collect and examine data in order to evaluate a program or a policy, they usually proceed in an orderly way from simple statistics to multivariate statistics. With the understanding that in answering this question you, too, are to proceed from simple statistics to multivariate statistics, CITE RELEVANT LITERATURE AND answer the following question:

Say you were asked to look at the link between poverty and health in Kentucky. What kinds of data would you collect? What specific variables might be useful? What (SPECIFIC) statistical techniques would you use, and what would those techniques tell you? (For example, one of the statistical techniques I might suggest is simple correlations. In that case, I would probably want to explain in words (not formulas) what a correlation is, and how to interpret it, and – in this example – what variables I would look at.)

4. Design a public sector research project using a public program or policy problem with which you are familiar. Be prepared to discuss the following:
 - defining the research question and selecting the appropriate research design;
 - types of data to be collected and special problems and properties of the data;
 - analytical methods to be used and special reliability and validity issues related to these methods;
 - if you plan to use survey research, be sure to cover questionnaire preparation, sampling, and interpretation of survey results;
 - if you plan to use secondary data sources, be sure to cover issues involved with using administrative data;
 - defining and discussing policy implications of your research.Cite relevant literature that supports your answer.

Questions focused on budget and finance

1. Be familiar with the concepts of fiscal and monetary policy. What instruments are used in the effort to control inflation and unemployment? Understand the role of the Federal Reserve and Congress in each of these policies.
2. What are the various types of taxes used by governments? Who are the actors that make funding decisions? How are they accountable to the public? How does the public influence this process? Why is taxing and spending so controversial?
3. What services are essential for state and local governments to provide? If economic times forced you to make decisions on which services to offer and at what levels and which services to cut how would you make those decisions? How might you fund these services in ways that are different from normal, i.e. the general fund and using the tax base? What would PA scholars recommend?
4. Describe the process through which the federal government makes its budget. Who are the major actors in the process? What strategies and tactics do they use

- during the budget-making process? What are the significant strategies, problems, and constraints that influence and shape the process?
5. Much has been made during the last twenty years of turning the administration of government services over to the private sector (privatization) or to third-party management (non-profits). Discuss the problems associated with these two concepts as well as the benefits of privatization and third-party management. Explain what the literature says about privatization and networking.
 6. What alternatives do governments have for reducing and shifting responsibility for services? What has been the impact of devolution on state and local funding requirements? What options are available to governments for alternate sources of revenues or funding mechanisms?
 7. Be familiar with some of the basic concepts and issues in public finance such as Capital Budgeting, Cash Management Strategies, Employee Pension Fund Issues. You should be able to discuss the strengths and problems associated with each of issues as well as the scholars who have written about them.

Questions focused on administrative and municipal law

1. Define administrative law and support the definition you chose. Restate the distinction between administrative agencies and the judiciary, both with regard to function and process. Make sure you understand and can express the role of due process in the two systems and the differences between them. You should also have a similar grasp of the concept of administrative discretion. Cite literature and legal cases that apply.
2. Describe the sources of and the limits on (1) administrative power and (2) administrative law. Cite relevant literature and legal cases.
3. From the standpoint of administrative law, discuss agency discretion and rulemaking authority with particular attention given to the nondelegation doctrine. Include relevant literature and legal cases to support your answer.
4. What legal foundations, as determined by the courts, do agencies have in administering the law? Cite relevant literature and legal cases.
5. Discuss the concept of a city being able to exercise its planning and development powers, not only within a city, but within one mile of the city boundaries as well. You should cite relevant cases.
6. Discuss the concept of Special Improvement Districts (SID's). Cite cases that uphold the legality of such districts.