

***Bureaucratic Politics in the U.S.***  
***Sages Departmental Seminar***  
**POSC 385/485**  
*"Spring" Term, 2014*  
Tuesday/Thursday 2:45 – 4:00 p.m.  
**Mather House 107**  
Syllabus: December 20, 2013

Professor Joseph White  
Office: Mather House 113  
368-2426

Office Hours:  
T/Th 1:00 – 2:30  
[jxw87@cwru.edu](mailto:jxw87@cwru.edu)

This course will fulfill the requirements for a SAGES departmental seminar. The department of political science views departmental seminars as an opportunity for students to carefully investigate core issues of the field. It also intends that the departmental seminars provide an introduction to what is expected for senior capstone projects. The SAGES program's emphasis on writing is supposed to be extended, in department seminars, to norms of writing within particular disciplines. Departmental seminars also should provide an introduction to oral presentation of a student's work. The assignments for this course are intended to satisfy those objectives.

### ***The Topic***

"Bureaucracy" is nowhere popular. Criticisms of bureaucracy as inefficient or uncaring, and "bureaucrats" as slothful or self-serving, are staples of American political rhetoric. When we hear about government agencies, and actually notice their names, it is often because they have screwed up to some major extent.

In political science courses, we seek to explain the political world. That begins with correcting views that normally are quite common in the wider society. The common view of "government bureaucracy" is misguided both in its view of complex organizations in general and its view of government organizations in particular. Therefore two goals of this course are:

\* Learning Objective 1: To increase understanding of organizational behavior and performance in general, beyond simplistic notions about "bureaucracy."

\* Learning Objective 2: To help students understand how the political context of government in the United States shapes the behavior of government agencies in particular.

The behavior and performance of any organization depends on its internal characteristics, aspects of its environment (such as how easy it is to gain resources), and the tasks it is trying to perform. The tasks are especially important not only because some things are harder than others, but because they determine what the organization needs from the

environment and the kind of internal skills and division of labor that are necessary. Thus we have:

\* Learning Objective 3: To understand how the success or failure of "bureaucracies" is shaped by their tasks.

Within the study of U.S. politics, however, we should study the behavior of government agencies for a much more basic reason. Everything government does works through some sort of administrative organization. Government in action means local bureaucracies such as schools, the police, the crews that maintain streets and the inspectors who check whether restaurants are sanitary; state bureaucracies that decide who will get a welfare check, that administer unemployment insurance and are supposed to ensure the safety of nursing homes; and national bureaucracies that mail checks to our elderly relatives, design and require nutrition labels on food products, or fight our wars. Therefore how public bureaucracies make decisions, and how they perform their tasks, is how government works for us, or on us. Therefore another goal of the course is:

\* Learning Objective 4: To begin to form an understanding of U.S. politics, including governing institutions such as Congress and the Presidency and intermediary institutions like interest groups and parties, that is based on how institutions influence the performance of the government's "operators" – the people who do the work.

The material in this course addresses the politics *of bureaucracies* – how government bureaus act and how and why they differ. But there is also a politics *about bureaucracy* – a continual effort to reform and improve “how government works.” The politics of reform is particularly irritating because much the same ideas keep coming back, though often with somewhat different labels. There are two reasons for what can seem like an endless cycle of reform.

First, most of what passes for "common sense" about both organizations and government is wrong, so many reform proposals are wrong-headed. There is a systematic gap between how many people think about organizations and how organizations do or can work. As a result, reform ideas are policy zombies – they can't die because they fit "common sense" (such as "government should run like a business") but can't live because the "common sense" is wrong (most government activities cannot and should not be run like a business). Second, people in the political system want the bureaucracy to satisfy goals that contradict each other, such as "neutral competence" and "executive leadership." So another reason for endless reform is that different goals are prioritized at different times. No form of organization maximizes all values. Hence we have:

\* Learning Objective 5: To begin to understand the sources and results of attempts to reform the public service in the United States.

The course material will switch back and forth between understanding organizations, and understanding the context of U.S. government. The final part of the course will integrate

these views by reading James Q. Wilson's *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*.

Early in the class we will also read a text (available on blackboard) that gives a classic statement of how the challenge of making government organizations successful looks to a (very sophisticated) manager: Gordon Chase and Elizabeth C. Reveal's, *How to Manage in the Public Sector*.

### **Assignments:**

**The written work for this course will include three book reviews and three quizzes.** Students are also expected to come to class prepared to discuss the course materials; I may ask individual students to lead off class discussion by posing questions or making observations.

### ***Book Review Assignments***

Many political science courses require a research paper. Even though that is a common form of disciplinary writing, this course will not. Instead, this course will emphasize another form of writing: review of someone else's book or books.

Book reviews can have multiple purposes. But all reviews do some of the same things. They explain to the reader what is in the book. In order to do so without just repeating the book, the reviewer decides what aspects of the book are particularly important for readers to understand. In making this selection, the reviewer makes a judgment about what is already known or at least believed about the topic – such as political Islam, or democratization, or health care reform – and so how the book she is reviewing contributes to knowledge. The reviewer may conclude the book makes important contributions and explain why interested readers of the review should read the book; the reviewer may conclude that the book is dead wrong because it is invalidated by better work in the field, so tell readers of the review not to waste their time reading the book; or something in between.

A book review therefore is a service to the community of scholars. There are too many books to read, so good reviews help us winnow the field – or notice work we would have ignored because we just can't keep track of everything. Many journals have a book review section, and some are dedicated mainly to reviews, because this is so helpful.

But a book review is also a version of what we all do – what you all should do – when you read a book (or article, or chapter). The question about any information is what it adds to your understanding. Your understanding is built, brick-by-brick. Sometimes a book or other work helps you add a virtual room to the building. Sometimes it forces you to tear down part of the structure you had already constructed. And sometimes you say, "this material is flawed, I won't use it."

The book review assignments therefore have two broad goals. The first is to give you practice in thinking hard about how material adds (hopefully) to your knowledge. The second is to have you write for an audience. The audience, in this case, is a rather specialized one: your classmates and me. You can assume that, at a minimum, we have a baseline of shared knowledge: the class readings as of the time you are writing the assignment. So that class material is the “what is already known or at least believed about the topic” to which your review should refer.

***Books to be reviewed.***

There will be three book review assignments. For one assignment, all students will review the same book, Diane Ravitch’s *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*. This is an account and critique of recent efforts to reform what might be the most important public bureaucracy, as well as the one with which you are most familiar. It raises issues about professional autonomy, measurement of performance, defining goals, and the differences between markets and government that are also raised at various points in the rest of the course. **The review of *Reforming Child Welfare* will be due on the last Monday of class, April 22.**

For the other two reviews, each student will pick a pair of books. The appendix to this syllabus lists six possible pairs. Then there will be two papers and an oral presentation. In the first, the student will review one book. That first review will be due on March 4. Students will describe their books to the rest of the class on that day and, if we do not finish that day, in later classes. The second review and the oral presentation should cover both books. It should discuss how each contributes to (or is refuted by) the understanding one would begin to form from class material.

The purpose of the oral presentation is to meet the SAGES goal of encouraging this form of communication skill. The presentation for this class is similar to the Political Science department’s system for SAGES Capstone/Senior Projects. It will be held in the time block reserved for the final exam so at **12:30 p.m. on May 1**, and be structured like an academic meeting.

Each student will have at least ten minutes and no more than 20 to present her analysis of the two books she has read. Actual time allowed will depend on the number of presentations. Other students will be given short forms on which to record their reactions to the presentations. These forms will be anonymous, and each student will be given copies of the comments on her own talk. The instructor will also prepare a commentary as part of the grading process.

Grades for the presentations will be based on the extent to which the student manages to explain the questions, research, and conclusions clearly within the limited time available. I will also be glad to meet with each student subsequently to discuss his talk, but having that conversation will not be a required part of this course.

This **final book review will be due on May 5**, so is equivalent to a final paper for the course. Students may benefit from the reaction to their oral presentations as they draft the final version of this review.

### *Quizzes:*

There will be three quizzes, each about the reading to that point (since the previous quiz). For each quiz I will distribute study questions at the previous class. Each quiz will be for about 35 minutes, so the balance of that class period can be used for other purposes. Each quiz will provide some choice of questions. The questions will be short answers designed to assess understanding of concepts in the reading.

### *Extra Work for Graduate Students*

According to university regulations, in any class that includes both undergraduate and graduate students, graduate students must have more extensive assignments. Therefore students registered for POSC 485 will be required to write more extensive book reviews, as indicated by the minimum word expectations below.

### *General Expectations*

This course is a cooperative endeavor. For my part, I will strive to provide guidance, direction, and thoughtful evaluation. For your part, you should strive to be an active, contributing participant in the joint venture. **YOU MUST COMPLETE ALL ASSIGNMENTS TO RECEIVE A GRADE FOR THIS COURSE.**

**All students are expected to attend and participate in class discussion.** Discussion will focus on the reading: what it means, how it might be applied, and why you may or may not believe a particular argument or distinction.

### *Summary of Assignments Schedule, Length, and Portion of Grade*

(word length for graduate students in parentheses)

Feb 11: First quiz, 10%

Feb 27: Second quiz, 10%

March 4: First book review, 15%. Should be no less than 1000 (1500) words

April 15: Third quiz, 10%

April 22: Review of Diane Ravitch book, 15%. Should be no less than 1500 (2000) words.

May 1: Presentations: 5%

May 5: Final review of two books together: 25%. Should be no less than 2000 (2500) words.

Class Participation: 10%

My grading calculations are on a +/- basis. Your individual assignments may be graded with pluses or minuses or even as a borderline (e.g. "A-/B+"). The final grade, as

required by college rules, will be reported as an “A” or “B” or whatever. But my calculations will include much more variation.

*Grading Participation:* In my grading rules, active participation can only help your grade. I know that some students worry about saying something “dumb” or “wrong” in class, so tend to be quiet. There is no such thing as a dumb question. If you’re confused by something, somebody else is, too. I don’t imagine that everything I say is crystal clear, both because I’m not perfect and because the material can be hard. After all, much of what you will learn in this course differs from what most people believe. Participation is valuable simply to keep discussion going and move the class along, and professors tend to appreciate it for that reason – at least I do. What I look for in discussion is that students are engaging the material and wrestling with it.

So long as you attend class, the discussion portion of your grade will not reduce your overall grade. That is, if you have a "B" in other work, and meet the attendance standards, your discussion grade will be either a "B" or higher. Particularly good participation will receive an "A", and so can only help you earn the best overall grade.

You are expected, however, to attend class. Any student who misses more than five class sessions, without a documented and approved excuse, will have their participation grade reduced by one whole grade (e.g., B- instead of A-). A student who misses more than ten class sessions without appropriate documented and approved reasons would have their participation score penalized by two whole grades (e.g. C instead of A). A student who misses more than fifteen class sessions without appropriate documented and approved reasons will receive an "F" for the participation portion of the course grade.

### ***Obtaining the Readings***

Two assigned books for this course may be purchased at the university bookstore, or elsewhere:

James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education* (New York: Basic Books revised paperback edition, 2011)

Other readings will be available on the blackboard site, except for one short book, *The Pentagon Labyrinth*, that can be downloaded from public sites.

**Because this is a seminar course, I strongly urge you to bring copies of each day’s assigned reading to that class.**

### ***SCHEDULE of CLASS MEETINGS and ASSIGNMENTS***

January 14: Organizational meeting. Discussion of syllabus, lecture on possible ways that “the public” might influence behavior of government agencies.

January 16: Perspectives on public administration.

Simon, Smithburg and Thompson, “Foreword(s)” to *Public Administration*.

January 21: Development of the federal service

Daniel Carpenter, “The Evolution of National Bureaucracy in the United States”

Herbert Kaufman, “Emerging Conflicts in the Doctrines of Public Administration”

January 23: Contrasting Case Studies – Prisons, Part 1

Ted Conover, “Guarding Sing Sing”

Note: Either the class will not meet or there will be a guest instructor, as Professor White must attend a conference.

January 28: Contrasting Case Studies – Prisons, Part 2

John J. DiIulio, Jr, “Principled Agents: The Cultural Bases of Behavior in a Federal Government Bureaucracy”

January 30: Managing in the Public Sector (1)

Graham T. Allison Jr., “Public and Private Management: Are They Fundamentally Alike in All Unimportant Respects?”

Hugh Hecl, “Political Executives and the Washington Bureaucracy”

**Students must have made their book review choices by today.**

February 4: Managing in the Public Sector (2)

Gordon Chase and Elizabeth C. Reveal, *How to Manage in the Public Sector*. Preface; Prologue; Chapter 1, “Managers, Players, and Problems”; Chapter 2, “Managers, Bosses, and Chiefs.”

February 6: Managing in the Public Sector (3)

Gordon Chase and Elizabeth C. Reveal, *How to Manage in the Public Sector*. Chapter 3, “Managers and Managers: Coping with Overhead Problems”; Chapter 4, “Managers, Legislators, and Other Elected Officials.”

Edwin O. Stene, "Seven Letters: A Case in Public Management"

February 11: Managing in the Public Sector (4)

Gordon Chase and Elizabeth C. Reveal, *How to Manage in the Public Sector*. Chapter 5, “Managers, Communities, Special Interests”; Chapter 6, “The Manager and the Media; Epilogue, “Managers and Perspective.”

**First Quiz Today**

February 13: Reading and Writing Book Reviews

Examples from CWRU political science faculty, from blackboard site.

February 18: Basic Aspects of Organization (1)

Simon, Smithburg and Thompson Chapter 7, "Dividing the Work: Specialization."

Henry Mintzberg, "The Power Game and the Players."

February 20: Basic Aspects of Organization (2)

Simon, Smithburg and Thompson Chapters 8-9, "Securing Teamwork: Authority" and "Securing Teamwork: The Structure of Authority and Status".

February 25: Basic Aspects of Organization (3)

Simon, Smithburg and Thompson Chapter 10, "Securing Teamwork: The Communication Process"

Jeffrey Pfeffer, "Understanding Power in Organizations" 21 pp.

February 27: Partial Authority (1)

Thomas H. Hammond, "Herding Cats in University Hierarchies"

**Second Quiz Today**

**March 4: First Book Reviews Due. Class Discussions of the books.**

March 6: Partial Authority (2)

Paul Posner, "Accountability Challenges of Third-Party Governance," 52 pp.

***SPRING BREAK, MARCH 10-14***

March 18: Representation?

John Clayton Thomas, "Citizen, Customer, Partner: Rethinking the Place of the Public in Public Management"; David R. Eichenenthal, "Commentary: What About the Public as Voter and Taxpayer?"

Alexander C. Henderson, "Examining Policy Implementation in Health Care: Rule Abidance and Deviation in Emergency Medical Services."

Renee A. Irvin and John Stansbury, "Citizen Participation in Decision Making: Is It Worth the Effort?" .

Joel D. Aberbach and Bert A. Rockman, "Mandates or Mandarins? Control and Discretion in the Modern Administrative State"

March 20: The Public Sector Managing Us? (1)

Essays 1-5 from Center for Defense Information, *The Pentagon Labyrinth*, (February 2011), downloadable from <http://dnipogo.org/labyrinth/>

March 25: The Public Sector Managing Us? (2)

Essays 6-10 from Center for Defense Information, *The Pentagon Labyrinth*, (February 2011), downloadable from <http://dnipogo.org/labyrinth/>

March 27: Organization and Tasks



Wilson, Preface and Chapters 1-3

April 1: Workers

Wilson: Chapters 4-6, pp. 50 – 110

Robert K. Merton, "Bureaucratic Structure and Personality".

April 3: Managers and Executives (1)

Wilson, Chapters 7-9, pp. 113-175

Choi and Whitford, "Merit-based Pay and Employee Motivation in Federal Agencies"

April 8: Managers and Executives (2)

Wilson, Chapters 10-12, pp. 179-232

April 10: Political Context (1)

Wilson, Chapters 13-14, 235-276

April 15: Political Context (2)

Wilson, Chapters 15-16, 277-312

**Third Quiz Today**

April 17: Reform (1)

Wilson, Chaps 17-20, 315-378

April 22: **Submit Reviews of Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System***

Class discussion of the book

**April 24: Last day of class, but no session because Professor White must be at a conference.**

### **PRESENTATIONS INSTEAD OF THE FINAL EXAM**

**Thursday, May 1, 12:30 – 3:30 p.m.**

Rather than hold a final exam, we will hold the equivalent of an academic meeting. Each student or group of students will have at least fifteen minutes to present their analyses of the two books they have reviewed. Actual time allowed will depend on the number of presentations. Other students will be given short forms on which to record their reactions to the presentations. These forms will be anonymous, and each student will be given copies of the comments on her own talk. The instructor will also prepare a commentary as part of the grading process.

Grades for the presentations will be based on the extent to which the student manages to explain the questions, research, and conclusions clearly within the limited time available.

I will also be glad to meet with each student subsequently to discuss their talk, but having that conversation will not be a required part of this course.

**Final papers are due by Noon on Monday, May 5.**

## Appendix: Pairs of Books Students May Choose to Review

Students can choose pairs of books to review from the following options:

### 1) General overviews of organizations:

Anthony Downs, *Inside Bureaucracy* (Boston: Little, Brown 1967; reissued 1993)  
James D. Thompson, *Organizations in Action: Social Science Bases of Administrative Theory* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967; reissued 2003)

or: Chester Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive*, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971)

Herbert Kaufman, *The Forest Ranger: A Study in Administrative Behavior* (Baltimore or Washington DC: Resources for the Future, 1960, 1993, or 2006)

### 2) Issues of Representation and Accountability:

William T. Gormley and Steven J. Balla, *Bureaucracy and Democracy: Accountability and Performance* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2012)

Frederick C. Mosher, *Democracy and the Public Service* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

### 3) Case Studies

Julianne G. Mahler and Maureen Hogan Casamayou, *Organizational Learning at NASA: The Challenger and Columbia Accidents*, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009)

W. Henry Lambright, *Powering Apollo: James C. Webb of NASA* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995)

or: Martha Derthick, *Policymaking for Social Security* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1979)

Martha Derthick, *Agency Under Stress: The Social Security Administration in American Government* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1990)

or: Olivia Golden, *Reforming Child Welfare* (Washington DC: Urban Institute Press, 2009)

Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky, *Implementation: Why Great Expectations in Washington are Dashed in Oakland; Or, Why It's Amazing that Federal Programs Work at All, This Being a Saga of the Economic Development Administration as Told by Two Sympathetic Observers Who Seek to Build Morals on a Foundation of Ruined Hopes* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984)