

Doctoral Comprehensive Exam in Public Administration
School of Public Affairs
American University

Fall 2009

Answer three of the following questions in 4.5 hours. Try to avoid duplication if possible.

1. A forthcoming special issue of *Public Administration Review* will focus on predictions regarding the intellectual content of public administration as a field (or discipline) of academic study in the year 2020. What aspects of public administration and its socio-economic political and other environments would you consider in developing such predictions? Based on these considerations, what would you predict?
2. Some scholars have noted that the study of American bureaucracy is riven with schisms that are holding back cumulative theory building. These are reflected in three ways. First, a lack of cross-referencing of relevant research on American bureaucracy exists across cognate (i.e., related) fields of study in public administration, public management, political science, and public policy. Second, and more substantively, is a tendency to decouple the study of politics, bureaucracy, and public policy. Third, researchers fragment the study of the policy process into stages, when stages of the policy process cannot really be separated. Fourth, researchers tend to treat the inner workings of agency behavior as a 'black box' operationalized by measures that sometimes hit the mark and other times are purely data driven. Finally, researchers increasingly take ahistorical, decontextualized, and insufficiently diachronic (i.e., longitudinal) approaches in much contemporary research.

Taking any public administration, public management, or policy research area or topic of your choice, discuss whether or not—and why—you agree with any one of these general criticisms and whether theory building is being held back or actually advanced by it. While focusing on any one criticism, don't hesitate to refer to other relevant critiques in making your argument.

3. Public administrative theory, values, and practice are sometimes said to be a product of the ideology of a nation's dominant political leadership or coalition. The U.S. is a reasonably good place to test such a proposition because it has historically had several distinctive archetypal models of public administration. Taking one or more of these historical models (including present "reinvention" or "post-reinvention," if you are so inclined), test the proposition. Regardless of your conclusion, briefly explain some of the wider implications of the proposition for public administrative theory.
4. The abstract of an essay on "U.S. Public Administration's Legal Dimensions" identifies three models, "The Madisonian model for the constitutional separation of powers; the 1946 legislative-centered model for administrative law; and the post-1950s judicial response model for infusing constitutional rights into public administrative practice." The essay concludes that "all three models will persist into the foreseeable future, but questions whether public administration's legal dimensions will be fully integrated into theory, research, scholarship, and pedagogy." Briefly outline the main elements of each model and then explain whether you agree with the essay's conclusion and why.

5. In 1926, Leonard White famously wrote that "The study of [public] administration should start from the base of management rather than the foundation of law, and is therefore more absorbed in the affairs of the American Management Association than in the decisions of the courts." This statement contains an implicit dichotomy (or at least sharp distinction) between management and law. What are the major differences between managerial and legal approaches in U.S. public administration? Do you believe that management theory still should be more central than court decisions to the study of U.S. public administration? Explain.
6. Are the current New Public Management-style reforms fundamentally different from prior reforms in American public administration? If so, why? If not, why not? What are the implications of your answer for accountability to the constitution, citizens, and for administration in a democratic system?
7. Discuss the relative merits of procedure/process versus results in the American public administrative system. Are the arguments for result-oriented management fundamentally at odds with values-based approaches? Or are they reconcilable, and if so, how can they be best reconciled? What are the scholarly assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of each approach? What are the criteria on which they base those assessments?
8. Performance measurement initiatives have been advanced as a vehicle for improved accountability. Yet is not at all clear whether they have achieved that goal. Discuss these efforts and analyze both the constraints and opportunities that have resulted from them.