

**PAD 6138**  
**CAPSTONE SEMINAR:**  
**CASE STUDIES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

**Fall 2002**

*Classroom: MHC 136, Thursdays, 6:10 - 9:00*

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***Course Description***

This is the capstone seminar of the MPA program. In this course we will develop our own cases in public policy and management as a way of integrating the entire MPA curriculum. And, once we have performed the integrating task, we will connect all this knowledge to your everyday life in public administration.

How did such an implausible task come to be part of the required core of MPA courses? Capstone courses emerged as a way for MPA students to avoid writing master's theses. "That's too academic. We're practitioners and we want to do something more related to the real world than to academia." That was the essence of the complaint. More importantly, a great many folks got to the thesis stage and never finished it, and hence never finished the degree. Public administration professors, being an accommodating sort of academic, were sympathetic to this, and so was NASPAA, the accrediting body of MPA programs. Some accredited programs require a comprehensive exam over the entire curriculum. Others have "integrative seminars." At FAU we transformed a course called "case studies in public administration" into the capstone seminar.

The upshot is that now we have a required course on the books whose historically relevant feature is that it is not a thesis. What the course is actually about, then, is for you to decide because the cases will come from your experience. What is it that case studies study? Things that actually happened; events that are imbued with meaning.

***Required Books***

Clemons, Randall S. and McBeth, Mark K. *Public Policy Praxis: Theory and Pragmatism: A Case Approach*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2001.

Miller, Hugh T. and Alkadry, Mohamad G., eds. *These Things Happen: Stories from the Public Sector*. Burke, Virginia: Chatelaine Press, 1998.

## ***Case Stories***

The writing in this course does not follow the usual distant, neutral, objective academic protocol. Stories are about living and feeling. The narratives for this course are aimed at the world of actual experience, where circumstances confront taboos, where the imperious situation faces the bureaucratic rule, and where the pre-written script encounters actual events.

The stories you write might be about public administration below the surface, where that feeling of human-ness still prevails. Stories sometimes convey the sense that we are constituted by something more compelling than rationality, statutes, and efficiency protocols; something solidly human, something full of meaning and community.

The stories appropriate for this course would not be intended to sell products, titillate the senses, or provide cheap emotional thrills. Rather, the stories would be about the free exchange of experience. To be human is to communicate one's experience with others, to share life itself, to bear witness to events as they unfolded. Stories are about shared experience. Hence, the stories you write are reports of first-hand experience, written by practicing public administrators -- namely, you. Your job in this class is to tell us what really happened.

Good writing, therefore, is a must. The first draft will not likely be perfect prose. Awkward sentences could have been rewritten. Misspelled words and faulty grammar could have been corrected. Sentence fragments and incomplete sentences could have been rewritten. Deadwood, fluff, and unnecessary verbiage that does not help describe events or enhance the meaning of your case could have been eliminated. Irrelevant distractions could have been ferreted out. A better choice of word might have been found.

Writing is a rewarding activity despite its burdens. It clarifies thinking, serves as a vehicle for expression, and enables the writer to make a thoughtful contribution to the public conversation. Without good writing, good thinking is robbed of the chance to reveal itself as such. Good writing expresses what the writer thinks and feels and does so in a way that provides the reader access to those thoughts.

## ***Participation***

Class time can be utilized best when students come to class prepared. Students should come to class prepared to discuss both the readings and their cases. Preparation is not merely necessary in the instrumental sense (good preparation => good grades) but is essential in the larger, professional sense as well. We are all entitled to be annoyed with so-called professionals who abuse our attention by being unprepared.

Obviously, students must attend class in order to participate in class discussion. Regardless of whether or not students have a good excuse -- I should hope there are no other kinds at this stage of the game -- those who miss three classes will be docked one half grade. Repeated tardiness would also lower the final grade.

In class discussion, it is often the case that students who are willing to risk making a mistake will be rewarded with learning opportunities. Attendance is required for there to be engagement at all, but moreover, students must learn to move beyond merely hearing the statements of others; students must listen and evaluate. Some guidelines are necessary for the discursive classroom envisioned here. While all of us

should expect our ideas to be challenged, the classroom should also be a safe place where no one is disparaged or dismissed on account of race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, or age. Discussions should focus on substantive matters so as to avoid *ad hominem* attacks.

Students should not, however, be so cautiously mindful of these guidelines that they fail to offer any comments for fear of saying the wrong thing. Constructive intention will usually get us through rough or uncomfortable times.

### ***Grading***

Each assignment below is worth 7%. A = 4.0; A- = 3.7; B+ = 3.3, etc. Length should be about 3 – 5 pages. Also, nine percent of your total grade is based on the quality of your classroom participation. Or you can skip the 13 written assignments and write a 50 page term paper instead. Either way, you have to get to class on time.

## Course Schedule

### **August 22: Mythos and Logos: Story Telling, Case Studies, and Rational Inquiry**

### **August 29: The Public, Politics, and Public Administration.**

Reading: Miller and Alkadry, Part 1 (10 stories)

Assignment 1: Story on citizen-government interaction

### **September 5: Power, People, and Pluralism**

Reading: Clemons and McBeth, Chapter 1

Assignment 2: Is this democracy, or what?

### **September 12: What do we mean when we say “rational”?**

Reading: Clemons and McBeth, Chapter 2, Chapter 3

Assignment 3: Rationality taken too far

### **September 19: Innovation**

Reading: Miller and Alkadry, Part 2

Assignment 4: An innovation

### **September 26: Rules and procedures that generate rules and procedures**

Reading: Miller and Alkadry, Part 3

Assignment 5: Knowing when to break the rules

### **October 3: Politics**

Reading: Clemons and McBeth, Chapter 4

Assignment 6: Strategically crafted arguments

### **October 10: Making knowledge (without much in the way of method)**

Assignment 7: I know something that was not validated scientifically

### **October 17: Democracy revisited**

Assignment 8: Democracy as something other than voting

### **October 24: Survey research and etc.**

Assignment 9: Number crunching

### **October 31: Phronesis**

Assignment 10: Context, action, and moral reflection

**November 7: Should MPA's get first dibs on jobs?**

Assignment 11: Merit civil service (or not)

**November 14: An Ethical Dilemma**

Assignment 12: An ethical dilemma

**November 21: Corrupt Practices**

Assignment 13: Was this corruption?

**December 12: Final Exam Week: Class discussion: The thesis option revisited:  
Episteme and phronesis.**