Course Syllabus

PAD 6908 Action Report  
Summer Semester 2014, Mondays, 5:30-8:15 p.m., BEL 116  
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Office Hours for Students: Mondays 3:30-5:15 pm

Texts


Course Organization and Purpose

This tutorial is for Master of Public Administration degree candidates and serves as a final semester culmination of learning in the program. As such, it fulfills the requirements of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA). Each person is to prepare a paper relating to a significant administrative practice or problem. This is considered an essential component in the development of professional knowledge and ability in applying the study of public administration to important issues. The Action Report, therefore, should be regarded as a major applied research project akin to a Master's thesis; students should arrange their schedules accordingly. Departmental faculty may lend assistance, as appropriate, in topic identification, on procedures and methods, and for general reaction to findings. Seminar meetings will explore issues and methods related to writing the Report. Students are expected to attend scheduled sessions, participate in discussions, make presentations, and offer critiques of oral and written reports.

Competencies from the Course

In developing their topics, writing and revising their reports, and presenting their findings to the class and to members of the Askew School Advisory Board, students will learn and demonstrate how to:

1. **Apply ethical considerations in the evaluation of proposed policies, programs, and administrative arrangements.** In their analyses, students are expected to evaluate alternative actions in terms of their equity, respect for human dignity, potential to create moral hazards, or other normative considerations.

2. **Summarize complex information in tables and graphs.** In their analyses, students are expected to present quantitative data in bar charts, line graphs, frequency
distributions, or other data presentation techniques that communicate quantitative information succinctly. Students are required to explain the meaning of at least one table or graph in their oral presentations. Their presentations must also utilize PowerPoint slides.

3. **Assess political and administrative feasibility.** In their analyses, most students apply one or more evaluative criteria related to the practicality of each alternative under review. To do so, students must consider public opinion, elite opinion, political results of similar initiatives in other states, and similar factors and evidence.

4. **Reconstruct the history and dynamics of policy and administration in enduring policy arenas.** The Action Report includes a background section that must explain why and how the issue became a matter of public concern, how it has been addressed over time, and what policy or administrative options, if any, are currently being considered.

5. **Apply academic theories and research to policy and administrative issues and options.** The Action Report includes a literature review that summarizes relevant scholarly studies. Students draw on the ideas and findings in the literature in developing and assessing alternative policies, programs, and/or administrative procedures.

6. **Reach balanced judgments that take into account the tradeoffs and crosscutting implications of most policy and administrative options.** In their Action Reports, students are expected to evaluate each alternative under review against multiple evaluative criteria. Typically, options have different advantages and disadvantages, but no option is uniformly either beneficial or problematic. For example, options that are likely to be most effective are often very expensive, while less expensive options frequently suffer from disappointing results. Students prepare an evaluative matrix to make their judgments about such tradeoffs explicit.

**Institutional Review Board**

Notify the instructor if you plan to conduct any interviews or other research on human subjects. Before proceeding, you must obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (sometimes called the Human Subjects Committee). There is a form that must be submitted. The requirements can be found at this website: http://www.research.fsu.edu/humansubjects/

**The FSU Honor Code**

Students are expected to uphold the Academic Honor Code published in the Florida State University Bulletin and the Student Handbook. The Academic Honor Code of The Florida State University requires students to (1) uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in their own work, (2) refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the university community, and (3) foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility.
Violations of the Academic Honor Code are delineated in Chapter 8 of the Faculty Handbook (8.22.1 (b)). Students in PAD 5035 should pay special attention to paragraph 2.

2. Regarding academic assignments, violations of the Academic Honor Code shall include representing another’s work or any part thereof, be it published or unpublished, as one’s own. It shall also include presenting or submitting any academic work in a manner that impairs the instructor’s ability to assess the student’s academic performance. For example, plagiarism includes failure to use quotation marks or other conventional markings around material quoted from any source.

Plagiarism on the Action Report has severe penalties. See below under “Submission Requirements.”

ADA Policy

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and (2) bring a letter to the professors indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first class.

Schedule

May 12: Introduction – Attend Class

May 19: If not yet approved, submit your Proposal during the week so that I can review it. Individual consultations as necessary.

May 26: Memorial Day – No Class. This week, turn in Diploma Request (see Velda Williams).

Jun. 2: Individual consultations will be scheduled for later in the week as necessary.

Jun. 9: Individual consultations, as necessary.

Jun. 16: Attend class to submit 1st draft of report.

Jun. 23: Individual consultations, as necessary. Reviews of 1st drafts will be placed in student folders

Jun. 30: Individual consultations, as necessary

Jul. 7: Individual consultations, as necessary
Jul. 14: Attend class to submit 2nd draft of report. Class attendance also required to allow some practice with the presentation room and equipment.

Jul. 21: Action Report presentations to class.

Jul. 28: Remaining Action Report presentations to class.

Aug. 1: Last day to submit final report

Aug. 5: Grades Due To Registrar

Submission Requirements

The Action Report must be submitted to SafeAssign at each major stage of the drafting process. This includes the first draft, the second draft, and the final report. Go to the assignments folder on the course website on blackboard. Click on the appropriate link, depending on which draft you are submitting, and upload the paper. If there are any plagiarism problems with the draft, consult with the professor about revising it to eliminate all plagiarism. Please be aware that plagiarism on any draft of the action report, if not remediated immediately, will be handled by a Step 2 hearing process which can result in dismissal from the University and the withholding of your Masters degree. The university policy specifically states: “Allegations of academic dishonesty involving a graduate student engaged in any phase of the preliminary examination, thesis, or dissertation will be treated as egregious and will be resolved through the Step 2 process . . .” Please review the list of possible penalties from a Step 2 hearing at this website: http://academichonor.fsu.edu/policy/policy.html

Hardcopies of drafts should also be submitted, as follows. Papers should be stapled in the upper left hand corner and submitted in a “two pocket” folder. In the left section, place the most recent instructor-corrected copy (earlier drafts should not be included); in the right section, the newest draft with . Be sure to put your telephone number(s) and e-mail address on the front of the folder.

This class is structured to ensure progress toward course completion and relies on individual consultations and student presentations. Not meeting deadlines demonstrates inadequate planning. Please do not ask for special favors; brief extensions will be granted only on the basis of extreme, documented emergencies.

Do not expect the instructor to copyedit and proof your work. Names of proof readers and editors can be obtained from the English Department (644-4230).

The final Action Report that is submitted should be bound. Kinkos, Target, and similar outlets can provide binding. The electronic copy should be on CD or floppy disc.
**Action Report Standards**

The MPA Program is to "produce professionals capable of intelligent and creative analysis, communication, and action in the public sector context." The Action Report, as noted earlier, is the capstone of this educational experience. Accordingly, it provides the opportunity for students to demonstrate ability to define and diagnose decision situations, collect relevant data, perform logical analysis, develop alternatives, implement a course of action, and evaluate results; organize and communicate clearly to a variety of audiences through formats including verbal presentations, technical reports, and statistical charts, graphs, and tables (NASPAA Standards).

**Action Report Layout**

The Report should be: from 25 to 35 manuscript pages (plus appendices), professionally typed and of a quality comparable to a monograph published by university service bureaus, government agencies, legislative committees, or professional organizations.

Following the title page, table of contents, and a brief executive summary (describing the problem, the methods used in the study, alternatives considered, and the recommended action), the Report should be presented as described below.

I. **Problem Statement** (two pages in a 30-page report (not including front matter, references, and appendices))

- Concise statement of the problem or question being investigated;
- Brief discussion of issues surrounding the problem and the proposed actions being evaluated;
- Explanation of why the problem or question is significant in public administration.

II. **Background and Literature Review** (about six-eight pages)

- **Background**
  - The nature of the problem should be elaborated. How did the problem evolve? How has it changed over time?
  - What is the current status of the problem?
  - Specify the context in which the problem occurs and its timeliness for public administration.
  - The background section must present quantitative data related to the problem or issue. This can be quantitative data on enrollments, clients served, performance indicators over time, financial data, and so on. The data should be presented in the clearest possible terms. Where appropriate, use bar charts, line graphs, frequency distributions, or other data presentation techniques that communicate quantitative information succinctly to legislators and administrators.
• Literature Review
  o In the literature review, avoid a book report mode of presentation. Identify at least three major topics addressed in the literature. Summarize each topic in terms of the main issue addressed, and identify the positions taken on the issue. If there is agreement, say so, and summarize the agreement. If there is disagreement, indicate that there is division among scholars, and summarize the different positions. When you state the different positions of agreement or disagreement, it is appropriate at that point to summarize specific articles or books.
  o In the literature review, include both academic research and major reports of government agencies.
  o Describe how the present study relates to existing literature. What guidance does the literature provide? What issues remain that are pertinent to the problem under analysis? To what extent and in what ways will the findings in the literature review be used to reach judgments in the application of evaluative criteria to policy alternatives being considered?

III. Research Methodology and Evaluative Criteria (about two pages)

• Research Methodology
  o State the procedures, methods, and basic assumptions to be followed (regardless of the quantitative/qualitative character of the study); define terms, in a footnote, that are subject to multiple meaning.
  o If you are conducting original research, describe methods of collecting, analyzing and treating data, that is, the research design.
  o Discuss your sources for secondary data, and report any data problems or issues.

• Evaluative Criteria
  o Indicate clearly the criteria (and appropriate indicators and data sources for each) to be used in evaluating the management options, policy options, or action options. Students are strongly encouraged to use at least one of the evaluative criteria for the application of ethical or normative considerations. Students typically use cost, likely effectiveness, political feasibility, and similar criteria. These are fine, but it is important also to consider how the policy options may create moral hazards, encourage exploitative behavior, or generally set up incentives that produce untoward actions. Performance management has the potential to do this if care is not taken to ensure that performance is measured in a balanced and holistic way. For example, in student achievement testing, a not insubstantial number of school districts have had problems with teachers changing the answers on the test to improve the scores of the students.
Discuss any methodological weaknesses that might affect the reliability and validity of the findings.

IV. Policy Options (about 10-15 pages)

Present the policy options that are to be evaluated. Ensure that the options are presented in a logical, clear, and well-written manner. They should directly address the problem posed in the title of the paper. Utilize the literature referenced in Part II. Systematically employ the evaluation criteria identified in Part III.

Take up each policy option in turn, and apply each of the evaluation criterion to it. Rate the policy option on the criterion in terms such as negative, neutral, positive. Tell the reader precisely what the rating is and why. At the end of the action report, include a matrix that looks something like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option 1</th>
<th>Option 2</th>
<th>Option 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criterion 1</td>
<td>Criterion 2</td>
<td>Criterion 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

V. Conclusion/Recommendation for Action (about two pages)

Public officials must often make decisions based upon limited information; therefore, you must develop a carefully fashioned conclusion, even though the findings may be somewhat inconclusive. Choose one of the options (or combination of options) examined in Part IV, summarize the reasons for reaching that decision (including why the other options are not adequate), and defend your selection by relating it directly to the original problem.

Optional Format

A similar, alternative format for the Report--consisting of an Introduction, Methodology, Findings, Discussion, and Options/Recommendations section--is permissible. Consult with the instructor regarding the School's file of past Action Reports.

Presentations

At the end of the semester, students will make presentations to an audience which includes fellow students and members of the School's Advisory Board. Dress professionally. Prepare a PowerPoint presentation. The presentations must be limited to 5 to 7 minutes. Your presentation should be a capsule summary of your Action Report. Be prepared to answer questions upon completion of your presentation.
**Grades**

Grades for the course will be based on a multidimensional evaluation of the Action Report. The criteria and the weight assigned to them are as follows:

**Conceptualization and Writing (30%)**
- Clarity, cogency of problem conceptualization
- Relevance and range of evaluative criteria
- Clarity and grammatical correctness of writing

**Research (30%)**
- Scope and organization of background and literature review
- Quality of analysis and interpretation

**Recommendations (20%)**
- Consistency in application of evaluative criteria.
- Appropriateness of conclusions and recommendations.

**Presentation (20%)**
- Organization and conciseness of presentation
- Quality of speaking

Grade equivalencies are: 100-93=A, 92-90=A-, 89-87=B+, 86-83=B, 82-80=B-, 79-77=C+, 76-73=C, 72-70=C-, 69-67=D+, 66-63=D, 62-60=D-, 59-0=F. In the computation of final grades, all decimals from .5 and above are rounded up, and all below this are rounded down.