

Department of Public Administration & Policy
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Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination
Public Administration
Fall 2023

DIRECTIONS: Develop comprehensive, coherent, and well-flowing essays in response to your chosen questions in Parts I, II, and III. Please choose one question from each Part. Indicate by Part and number which question you are responding to at the beginning of each essay (i.e. PART 1 Question 1). Each question will be weighted equally. Cite appropriately throughout all of your work and provide full references at the end of each essay. Remember the 5,000 word limit for this exam, inclusive of all essays but not including reference pages.

PART I. Please answer one of the following two questions:

1. In an article published in Public Administration Review in 1947, Robert Dahl assessed the state of the field of public administration, particularly in terms of the prospect of a true science of public administration. He argued that the field then faced “three problems” that would have to be addressed before public administration could merit scientific status. These were: (1) clarifying the place of normative values in the field; (2) developing a better understanding of human nature in administrative settings, thus providing better predictability of behavior; and (3) generating a sophisticated comparative study of public administration. Given these criteria (and, if appropriate, any others that you care to add), how far has public administration come toward the goal of achieving scientific stature? Clarify and defend your assessment with reference to your knowledge of the research literature of the field.
2. The field of Public Administration has long been concerned about the existence and effects of bureaucratic discretion in democratic government, and the apparent difficulty of ensuring that bureaucrats – who are non-elected public officials – will act responsibly and be held accountable. Drawing from the classic and contemporary literatures, explain how various scholars have proposed that we manage the issue of bureaucratic discretion to achieve bureaucratic responsibility and accountability. In your opinion, which of these approaches seems most promising?

PART II. Please answer one of the following two questions:

3. Over the past several decades, a common feature in many democratic government systems has been the deterioration of the administrative state due to greater economic, social, and political inequality. Using the aforementioned information as a contextual backdrop, please characterize how the capacity of U.S. administrative state has been diminishing from this set of changes along the dimensions below. Please provide two (2) specific manifestations of how the U.S. administrative state has deteriorated from *each of these dimensions* based upon academic research (quantitative and qualitative). What implications do these manifestations have for affecting the ‘active’ (i.e., ‘substantive’) representative function of public administration within a democracy?
 - Personnel Systems
 - Devolution of Authority to Subnational Governments
 - Outsourcing/Contracting Out of Functions Performed by Government Administrative Institutions

4. A critical contemporary issue in public administration is the decline of public trust in administrative institutions. For example, Donald F. Kettl and Anne Khademian (<https://www.govexec.com/management/2020/07/building-trust-government-one-problem-time/166878/>) chronicle a widely accessible take on the key issues and challenges at stake based on their broader work with The National Academy of Public Administration focusing on “Grand Challenges in Public Administration” (<https://napawash.org/grand-challenges/the-12-grand-challenges>). How can contemporary academic research in public administration inform (and speak to) the following concerns relating to enhancing the public’s trust in governmental administrative institutions:
 - What are the political and administrative challenges for enhancing the public’s trust in these institutions?
 - How can administrative institutions use their expertise & discretion, greater continuity, and proximity to citizens when it comes to both goods and service delivery, to enhance public trust in an environment where political solutions to such challenges are not forthcoming?

PART III. Please answer one of the following two questions:

5. Scholars in public administration have often considered whether there are distinctive aspects to managing and organizing in the public sector. One of the frequent observations about those distinctive aspects holds that administrative leaders in government must operate within a distinctive “political” environment, that involves the political and governmental processes and institutions of a nation. Write a scholarly essay in which you analyze the nature of the political environment of public management and its implications for leading and managing, such as leading organizational change, motivating employees, establishing strategy, decision-making, or another topic. Cite relevant academic literature and research, including leading authors on the topics you choose to cover.

6. Discuss the distinction between “public management” and “public administration.” Why might some scholars see a distinction, and what form might the distinction take? What topics, types of research and/or scholarship, and theoretical bases might differ between the two topics? Cite important scholarly works and authors to support your observations and conclusions.