

PADP 4630: Politics and the Budgeting Process

Fall 2026 | CRN: 62877

Instructor: 'Dotun Seyingbo	Class Time: W/F - 8:15 - 9:35 AM
Email: aseyingbo@uga.edu	Location: Baldwin 311
Office Hours: Office - Baldwin Hall 406; W 12:00 - 2:00 PM via Zoom (insert link)	

Note: This syllabus is a general plan for the course. Reasonable changes announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Course Description:

The budget is a financial document, showing where public dollars come from and how they are spent, but it is also a political document. Budgets reveal who gets what, when, and how; they embody conflict over priorities, competing claims on public resources, and competing visions of the role of government. The budgeting process therefore sits at the center of democratic governance.

This course examines budgeting as a political process. It introduces students to the major theories of public budgeting, the institutions and actors that shape budget outcomes, and the practical stages of budget formulation, adoption, implementation, and oversight. The course begins with classic arguments about budgeting as bargaining and incremental adjustment, then moves to contemporary public budgeting across federal, state, and local governments, and concludes with comparative budgeting in other jurisdictions.

Particular attention will be paid to executive-legislative relations, fiscal choice under constraint, budget reform, intergovernmental politics, deficit politics, and the ways institutions shape budgetary outcomes. By the end of the semester, students should be able to interpret budgets not simply as technical plans, but as political settlements produced through conflict, negotiation, and institutional design.

At the end of this course students will be able to:

- Understand the political, institutional, and managerial foundations of public budgeting.
- Explain major theories of the budget process, including incrementalism, reform, and intergovernmental budgeting.
- Analyze the roles of executives, legislatures, agencies, and other actors in shaping budget outcomes.
- Understand the distinctive characteristics of budgeting at the federal, state, local, and comparative levels.
- Communicate clearly in writing and discussion about budget politics, public priorities, and fiscal decision-making.

Course Readings:

Books:

- Aaron Wildavsky, *The Politics of the Budgetary Process*. This text provides the classic theoretical foundation for the course and frames budgeting as a bargaining process embedded in institutions and routines.
- Irene S. Rubin, *The Politics of Public Budgeting: Getting and Spending, Borrowing and Balancing*. This text provides the principal contemporary treatment of budgeting across federal, state, and local governments.
- Katherine Willoughby. (2014). *Public budgeting in context: Structure, law, reform, and results*. John Wiley & Sons. This book can be accessed in the UGA electronic library. You do not need to purchase it unless you prefer a physical copy. Search the title on the multi search [here](#). Once you find it, select the book. Then, scroll to the bottom until you see “Other Formats and Editions” and select online access.
- George M. Guess and James D. Savage, *Comparative Public Budgeting*. This text extends the course beyond the United States and introduces cross-national and cross-jurisdictional perspectives on taxing, spending, and institutional design.

Additional articles, public documents, and short case materials will be posted on eLC. These may include budget speeches, legislative summaries, budget tables, executive budget materials, and selected scholarly articles.

Required Technology & Communication:

Lecture slides, announcements, reading prompts, and assignment instructions will be posted through eLC. Students are responsible for monitoring eLC and their UGA email regularly for updates and course communication.

Assignments should be submitted electronically through eLC unless otherwise noted. Please use your UGA email account for course communication and include the course number in the subject line.

Students should have regular access to a computer capable of reading PDF files and producing word-processed assignments. Spreadsheet work may be required for selected exercises, so access to Microsoft Excel is recommended. No advanced prior experience with Excel is required.

Assignments, Tests, and Grading:

Your final grade will be based on the following components:

Course Component	Weight
Class participation and attendance	15%
Weekly reading responses	20%
Policy/process memo	15%
Comparative budgeting brief	15%
Midterm exam	15%
Final research paper	20%

Reading responses are short weekly submissions that identify the central argument of the assigned readings, the budgetary or political problem under discussion, and one question or critique for class discussion. Responses should be concise, analytical, and submitted on time.

The policy/process memo asks students to explain a real budget conflict, procedural dispute, or fiscal controversy using concepts from Wildavsky and Rubin. The comparative budgeting brief asks students to compare budgeting in two jurisdictions, drawing especially on Guess and Savage.

The final research paper should demonstrate command of the course themes and make a sustained argument about a budgeting issue, institution, reform effort, or comparative case. The paper will normally be 10-12 pages, double-spaced, excluding references.

Scale: 100-94 A | 93-90 A- | 89-87 B+ | 86-84 B | 83-80 B- | 79-77 C+ | 76-74 C | 73-70 C- | 69-60 D | 59-0 F

Attendance:

Attendance is expected at every class meeting. Because this course depends heavily on discussion, close reading, and interpretation of political institutions, regular attendance is essential to your own success and to the quality of the course for others.

Participation includes more than being physically present. It includes arriving prepared, engaging the assigned materials seriously, listening respectfully, and contributing constructively to discussion. Excessive unexcused absences will affect the participation grade.

Late Assignments and Make-Up Policy:

Unless otherwise noted, written assignments are due on eLC at the beginning of class on the stated due date. Late work will lose 10% of the total point value for each calendar day it is late, up to a maximum penalty of 50%.

Extensions may be granted for legitimate reasons when requested before the deadline whenever possible. Make-up work for exams or time-sensitive assignments will be handled case by case. If you are dealing with illness, emergency, or another significant issue, please communicate as early as you can so that we can discuss appropriate arrangements.

Disability Resource Center:

If you anticipate needing accommodations due to the impact of a disability or medical condition, you should register with the Disability Resource Center and share the relevant documentation with me as early as possible so that accommodations can be arranged in a timely way. Additional information is available at <https://drc.uga.edu/>.

Withdrawal Policy:

The withdrawal deadline for Fall 2026 is Wednesday, November 11, 2026. Students are responsible for understanding University of Georgia withdrawal rules and deadlines. If you are considering withdrawal, I encourage you to speak with me early so that we can discuss your options and any available support.

Culture of Honesty Policy:

You are responsible for knowing and complying with University of Georgia policies regarding academic honesty. All submitted work must be your own unless collaboration is expressly authorized by the instructor.

Plagiarism, unauthorized assistance, fabrication, falsification, or any misrepresentation of sources or authorship constitutes academic dishonesty. Discussion with classmates about course ideas is encouraged, but all written work must reflect your own analysis and writing unless an assignment explicitly states otherwise.

Sensitive Issues:

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important in a course on politics, taxation, spending, inequality, and public conflict. We may discuss controversial questions about values, power, and priorities. Students are expected to engage one another seriously, professionally, and respectfully. Please let me know early in the semester if there are name or pronoun preferences I should observe.

Official Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy:

The University of Georgia prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis of legally protected categories. Students who experience discrimination, harassment, or retaliation are encouraged to seek assistance through the appropriate university channels. I am committed to maintaining a classroom environment that is respectful, inclusive, and conducive to learning.

Mental Health and Wellness Resources:

Students who need assistance are encouraged to use UGA wellness and counseling resources. Student Care and Outreach, Counseling and Psychiatric Services, and other campus services can help students navigate stress, crisis, and personal challenges. If circumstances are affecting your coursework, please reach out early so that we can discuss reasonable academic support.

AI Policy:

Artificial intelligence tools may be used in this course only in limited and transparent ways unless otherwise stated for a specific assignment. AI may assist with brainstorming, outlining, or revision support, but it may not substitute for reading, analysis, or original writing.

Any use of AI must be acknowledged in a brief note appended to the assignment that identifies the tool used, the purpose for which it was used, and the steps you took to verify and revise the output. Students remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of all submitted work. Undisclosed or deceptive use of AI may be treated as a violation of the academic honesty policy.

FERPA Notice:

The Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act grants students certain privacy rights regarding educational records. Students should consult university guidance for details about FERPA protections and directory information. Questions about privacy and records should be directed to the appropriate university office.

Assignments and Exams:

Class Participation:

Students are expected to complete the readings before class and come prepared to discuss the major arguments, concepts, and institutional dynamics raised by the texts. Participation will be evaluated on preparation, attentiveness, and constructive contribution to class discussion.

Weekly Reading Responses:

Students will submit short reading responses in most instructional weeks. These responses should identify the central argument of the reading, explain the main budgetary or political issue at stake, and raise one analytical question for discussion.

Policy/Process Memo:

The memo will ask students to explain a budget conflict, process dispute, or fiscal controversy using concepts from Wildavsky and Rubin. It should be approximately 4-5 pages and written in a professional policy memo format.

Comparative Budgeting Brief:

The brief will ask students to compare two jurisdictions outside a narrow U.S. federal frame, focusing on institutions, fiscal rules, executive-legislative relations, or intergovernmental finance. It should be approximately 4-5 pages.

Midterm Exam:

The midterm exam will cover the first half of the course, especially Wildavsky and Rubin. The exam will be administered in class on Friday, October 9, 2026, and may include identification, short answer, and essay questions.

Final Research Paper:

The final paper will require students to synthesize the major themes of the course in a sustained analytical argument. A list of suggested topics will be distributed in advance, though students may also propose a topic related to the course. The final submission deadline will align with the university-assigned final exam period for this course.

Course Schedule:

Includes topics, readings, and major due dates. Readings listed below are representative chapter assignments; exact page ranges and supplemental readings will be posted on eLC.

Week 1: Syllabus and Introduction to the Politics of Budgeting

Wednesday, August 19 – Course overview; what is a budget and why is it political?

Friday, August 21 – Budgets as policy, power, and priority-setting

Weekly Readings: Rubin, Introduction and Chapter 1.

Week 2: Wildavsky and the Budgetary Process

Wednesday, August 26 – Aaron Wildavsky and the classic study of budgeting

Friday, August 28 – Bargaining, routine, and budgetary roles

Weekly Readings: Wildavsky, opening chapters.

Week 3: Incrementalism, Stability, and Conflict

Wednesday, September 2 – Incremental budgeting and why change is often limited

Friday, September 4 – When incrementalism breaks down

Weekly Readings: Wildavsky, selected chapters; short supplemental article on incrementalism.

Week 4: Reform, Rationality, and the Limits of Comprehensive Budgeting

Wednesday, September 9 – Budget reform and the critique of comprehensive rationality

Friday, September 11 – Planning, performance, and the politics of reform

Weekly Readings: Wildavsky, selected reform chapters; supplemental article posted on eLC.

Week 5: Rubin and Contemporary Budget Politics

Wednesday, September 16 – From classic theory to contemporary public budgeting

Friday, September 18 – Power struggles, fiscal choice, and public accountability

Weekly Readings: Rubin, Chapters 2-3.

Week 6: Revenue, Spending, Borrowing, and Balancing

Wednesday, September 23 – Taxes, borrowing, and public choices

Friday, September 25 – Deficits, debt, and balanced-budget politics

Weekly Readings: Rubin, selected chapters on revenues, expenditures, and balancing.

Due: Policy/Process Memo due Friday, September 25.

Week 7: Federal Budgeting and Institutional Power

Wednesday, September 30 – The federal budget process: president, Congress, and agencies

Friday, October 2 – Appropriations, authorizations, and bargaining

Weekly Readings: Rubin, chapter on federal budgeting; supplemental institutional reading on eLC.

Week 8: Midterm Week

Wednesday, October 7 – Review and synthesis: Wildavsky and Rubin

Friday, October 9 – Midterm Exam

Weekly Readings: Review materials and instructor guidance distributed on eLC.

Week 9: State Budgeting and Intergovernmental Politics

Wednesday, October 14 – State budgeting, executive power, and fiscal rules

Friday, October 16 – Federalism and fiscal dependence

Weekly Readings: Rubin, chapter on state budgeting.

Week 10: Local Budgeting, Accountability, and Fiscal Stress

Wednesday, October 21 – Local budgeting and democratic accountability

Friday, October 23 – Fiscal stress, retrenchment, and public priorities

Weekly Readings: Rubin, chapter on local budgeting; short case reading posted on eLC.

Week 11: Comparative Budgeting I

Wednesday, October 28 – Why compare budgeting across jurisdictions?

Friday, October 30 – No class - Fall Break

Weekly Readings: Guess and Savage, Introduction and Chapter 1.

Week 12: Comparative Budgeting II

Wednesday, November 4 – Parliamentary and presidential systems in comparative perspective

Friday, November 6 – Centralization, decentralization, and budget authority

Weekly Readings: Guess and Savage, selected chapters.

Week 13: Comparative Budgeting III

Wednesday, November 11 – Budgeting in advanced and developing systems

Friday, November 13 – Comparative institutions and fiscal outcomes

Weekly Readings: Guess and Savage, selected chapters; comparative case materials on eLC.

Week 14: Comparative Cases and Student Presentations

Wednesday, November 18 – Comparative budgeting workshop

Friday, November 20 – Student presentations and synthesis discussion

Weekly Readings: Student-selected comparative cases and review materials.

Due: Comparative Budgeting Brief due Friday, November 20.

Week 15: Thanksgiving Break

Wednesday, November 25 – No class - Thanksgiving Break

Friday, November 27 – No class - Thanksgiving Break

Weekly Readings: No readings assigned.

Final Information:

Classes begin Monday, August 17, 2026. Drop/Add runs August 17-21, 2026. The university midterm date is Monday, October 5, 2026. Fall Break is Friday, October 30, 2026. The withdrawal deadline is Wednesday, November 11, 2026. Thanksgiving Break runs November 23-27, 2026. Classes end Tuesday, December 1, 2026, and Reading Day is Wednesday, December 2, 2026.

Because this course meets on Wednesday and Friday mornings, there are no regular class meetings after Friday, November 20, 2026. Final paper submission instructions and the exact deadline will be posted on eLC and aligned with the university-assigned final exam period for this course.