

# A Primer in Public Administration Theory

Junprof. Dr. Christina Isabel Zuber, Summer term 2016, Tuesdays 17:00 - 18:30

## Description

The seminar introduces students to important theoretical approaches in the field of public administration. We will first clarify why we need theory and distinguish normative and explanatory theories from each other. Following the selection made by Frederickson and Smith in their "Public Administration Theory Primer", we then proceed to discuss the following approaches: theories of political control of the bureaucracy, theories of bureaucratic politics, institutional theory, public management theory, decision theory, rational choice theory and governance theory. Whereas the chapters in Frederickson and Smith provide us with common ground for the seminar, participants will contribute presentations of research articles applying each approach. On the basis of the chapter on postmodern theory, we then conclude the seminar with a discussion of the challenges of theoretical description, explanation and prediction, given the complex realities of public administration structures and processes embedded in different societal contexts.

## Goals

In terms of substance, students know what theory is and can tell explanatory from normative theories. They know the advantages but also the limits of working with general theories in the social sciences. They know the main assumptions of several important theories in the field of public administration. This gives them a repertoire they can then choose from when writing a research paper in a BA advanced seminar in PA later in their studies.

In terms of methods, students know how to work with theoretical literature and empirical contributions. They know the main components of the research process and can identify these components in published articles. They know how to find relevant literature addressing a given theory and develop the research design for a research paper.

## Requirements and modalities

Requirements for this course are threefold:

First, participation: you come to class having carefully read and thought about the assigned reading materials for the week, and participate actively in class discussions. You may fail to attend two sessions.

Second, presentations, reviews and acting as a discussant: you find and present one article that was published in a peer reviewed journal<sup>1</sup> and that presents empirical research related to one of the theories we discuss during the seminar. In addition to presenting this article, you hand in an appr. 500 words review of the same article. The published article you choose to present must be uploaded to Ilias one week before the session at which it is presented. The review must be submitted by midnight of the day before the day you are scheduled to present your article. In addition, you once comment on somebody else's presentation in class, taking the role of a discussant.

Third, research design: by the end of the term, you develop and hand in a research design presenting a hypothetical research project you might conduct in the field of public administration related to one of the theories discussed in class. The research design should be of appr. 3000 words (double spaced, times new roman, 12pt), and should cover a clearly stated research question, a review of the state of the art, theoretical hypotheses and some first ideas for a methodological approach and potential data sources to provide evidence with regard to your hypotheses. It must be sent to christina.zuber@uni-konstanz.de (as an email attachment in pdf format, document labelled with your surname) by 15 September 2016.

Course evaluations will be based on a combination of in-class participation (10%), the presentation plus review plus discussant role (30%), and the research design (60%). Late submissions of the research design will lower your grade by 0.3 for each day your work is overdue, unless you provide a justified excuse on time. Please note that a student job does not count as a justified excuse.

I will provide you with more detailed guidelines on how to write a review and a research design paper in class. Please note that I have zero tolerance for plagiarism, which according to the Oxford Dictionary (online edition) is defined as "the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own". Students caught plagiarising will automatically fail the seminar. We will also discuss academic integrity and how to prevent plagiarism in class.

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<sup>1</sup> Some good PA journals are: *Journal of public administration research and theory*, *Journal of policy analysis and management*, *Policy sciences*, *Policy studies journal*, *Governance*, *Journal of European public policy*, *Public administration*, *Public administration review*.

## Individual sessions and literature to be prepared for each week

### 12 April 2016. Introduction

- For this first session, you do not have to prepare any material. We will introduce our plan for the whole semester and discuss what theories are, and why we need them.

### 19 April 2016. How to build and test theories: The research process

- Frederickson, H.G. and Kevin B. Smith. 2003. The public administration theory primer: Chapter 1: p. 1-15
- Gschwend, Thomas and Frank Schimmelfennig. 2007. Introduction: Designing research in political science – a dialogue between theory and data, in: Gschwend, Thomas, and Frank Schimmelfennig, eds. *Research Design in Political Science*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 1- 18.

### 26 April 2016. Theories of political control of the bureaucracy: compliance and responsiveness

- Frederickson & Smith. 2003, Chapter 2: p. 15-40
- Research article: Rauh, Jonathan. 2015. Predicting Political Influence on State Ethics Commissions: Of Course We Are Ethical—Nudge Nudge, Wink Wink. *Public Administration Review* 75(1): 98-110. **CHRISTINA**

### 3 May 2016. Theories of bureaucratic politics: bureaucrats as policy-makers

- Frederickson & Smith. 2003, Chapter 3: p. 41-66.
- Research article chosen by seminar participant **LENA AND THOMAS**, discussed by Lena K & Julian

### 10 May 2016. Letting things sink in I – what have we learned so far? // Preventing plagiarism and proper citing

- Literature discussed and skills acquired so far: please prepare questions and comments!
- Jones, Lars R. (2011): Academic Integrity & Academic Dishonesty: A Handbook About Cheating & Plagiarism, Revised & Expanded Edition. Available at <http://www.fit.edu/current/documents/plagiarism.pdf>.

### 17 May 2016. Public institutional theory: how institutions behave and perform

- Frederickson & Smith. 2003, Chapter 4: p. 67-94.
- Research article chosen by seminar participant **LENA K AND JULIAN**, discussed by Manuel and Mihail

### !! 24 May 2016. NO SESSION, I AM IN BELGRADE

### 31 May 2016. Practice session on searching academic literature with Judith Heeg from the Library in J213

- No literature

### 7 June 2016. Public management theory: borrowing from business

- Frederickson, H.G. and Kevin B. Smith. 2003. The public administration theory primer: Chapter 5: p. 95-125.
- Research article chosen by seminar participant **MANUEL AND MIHAIL**, discussed by Eunjung and Laure Helene

### 14 June 2016. Decision theory

- Frederickson, H.G. and Kevin B. Smith. 2003. The public administration theory primer: Chapter 7: 161-183.
- Research article chosen by seminar participant **EUNJUNG AND LAURE HELENE**, discussed by Vuk and Juraj

### 21 June 2016. Rational choice theory

- Frederickson, H.G. and Kevin B. Smith. 2003. The public administration theory primer: Chapter 8: 185-206.
- Research article chosen by seminar participant **VUK AND JURAJ**, discussed by Marie and Bea

### 28 June 2016. 17.00-18.30: Theories of governance: when “public” no longer means “government”

- Frederickson, H.G. and Kevin B. Smith. 2003. The public administration theory primer: Chapter 9: 207-228
- Research article chosen by seminar participant **MARIE AND BEA**, discussed by Jessica and Philipp

### 28 June 2016: 18:30 - open end, Beer Garden: Letting things sink in II – what have we learned so far?

- Literature discussed and skills acquired so far: please prepare questions and comments!

### 5 July 2016. Postmodern theory – contextual meaning and the limits of general knowledge

- Frederickson, H.G. and Kevin B. Smith. 2003. The public administration theory primer: Chapter 6: 127-160.
- Research article chosen by seminar participant **JESSICA AND PHILIPP**, discussed by Lena and Thomas

### 12 July 2016 – Concluding session

- Frederickson, H.G. and Kevin B. Smith. 2003. The public administration theory primer: Chapter 10: 229-247.
- Own notes