

2019 Public Management Field Examination

Field Question Section A (Answer one)

1. Donald Kettl asserted recently that the level of interdependence in governance has “radically changed the jobs of public administrators, who must now not only manage the functions of their own agencies but must also build critical linkages with others.” What types of policy making and service delivery arrangements do governments use that are based in such “critical linkages?” To what extent can public management scholars and practitioners usefully borrow from research done on bureaucratic organizations, and to what extent should the field of public management move away from bureaucracy as its defining structure and concentrate on research done on multi-organizational structures? Which approaches to research do you think would be least and most effective for contemporary scholars in identifying and explaining differences between the two contexts?
2. One of the ways scholars seek to distinguish the theory and practice of public management from management in business or other sectors is that “public” management is practiced in a democratic context. Democracy is presumably one of the reasons, perhaps the primary reason, why we differentiate public management from other varieties of management. Dwight Waldo, for example, was one of the first to acknowledge the centrality of public bureaucracy to democratic theory. In an article published in 1952, Waldo argued, “If administration is indeed ‘the core of modern government,’ then a theory of democracy in the twentieth century must embrace administration.” Over the years, how have theories of public management incorporated the institutional realities of their democratic context? Identify and critically assess efforts by public management scholars to accommodate or reconcile public management theory with democratic theory and institutions. In what ways, if any, is public management theory different from generic management theory because of the democratic context in which public managers and organizations operate?

Field Question Section B (Answer One)

1. Comparativist scholars are concerned with how existing theoretical frameworks apply to other settings that exhibit different political, economic, institutional, and cultural conditions. Even within the USA, public management reforms that might work in Indiana may have unexpected results in Alabama. To account for these conditions, how would you design a research project that takes into consideration variation in environmental context?
2. Public agencies in a variety of contexts are now required to develop and track strategic goals, performance targets, and other outcomes. Discussion by public management scholars considers citizen perceptions of organizational performance reports, managerial use of performance information, and the development of performance information systems by policymakers. Describe what contemporary empirical research has determined about how each of these groups (citizens, managers, and policymakers) interacts with performance information. From these findings, what are perhaps the biggest strengths and weaknesses of performance information systems? Finally, describe what questions scholars working in this area need to tackle in order to advance knowledge that can develop theory or provide useful information to practitioners.

3. Normative controversies and empirical issues abound over the extent and methods of political control over public bureaucracies. In an essay addressing major themes in the literature, summarize the normative arguments regarding how much political control over the bureaucracy should exist and the empirical findings to date about the effectiveness of various mechanisms for achieving political control over the bureaucracy.

Research Design Question (If you select question 1 in Field Question section B, it cannot be used as your research design question as well)

Part of the goal of your coursework and comprehensive exams is to provide training and preparation for your dissertation and research agenda. Engaging scholarship from your courses, propose a research design that can contribute new insight to the field of public management. You may select the area of interest (networking and collaboration, performance management, representative bureaucracy, workplace motivation, political control of the bureaucracy, or any other theoretical area in which you are well versed), but be sure to include a literature review, a theoretical approach to address the gap you identify in the literature, testable hypotheses derived from that theoretical approach, and a study design that considers potential data sources and methods that could be used to test your proposed hypotheses.