

**PUAD 700**  
**ETHICS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

Department of Public and International Affairs  
George Mason University – Fairfax Campus

Dr. Sheldon Edner  
Summer Term B, 2005

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION:

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: PUAD 700 is a capstone course for the MPA degree program. Capstone courses typically seek to provide an opportunity for students to intellectually integrate the substantive content of their coursework. This is an extraordinarily ambitious goal that even a semester long course is likely insufficient to accomplish. The true integration will emerge in the course of practicing public administration in the years ensuing after graduation. However, a single course can provide a context for facilitating the integrative process and that is our primary objective.

The lens through which we will pursue synthesizing your understanding of public administration is “ethics”. It forces us to consider both the element of choice confronted by each practitioner and the illusive concept of what is “right” in choice making. Your courses have (or will) provided you with theoretical constructs and research information that puts the enterprise of administration in sharper focus and makes the context more understandable. The study of ethics and cases raising ethical issues provide a means for each student to ask questions of themselves, e.g., How would I act in a similar situation? What would guide me in making choices? What forces shape the circumstances of decision-making? How should the process of decision-making be accomplished and with whom? Where does the public fit in the process and outcome? Are professional standards and expectations useful?

Each “organization” or entity in the public sector approaches problems and decisions with a unique perspective. Each administrative actor within those organizations brings his or her own personal value set to the process of achieving public purposes and outcomes. Each professional association or discipline also “expects” its members to reflect the tenants of their focus or “calling” and skill set. These differing values, perspectives, goals and purposes must be integrated or clarified so that action can be taken. Ethics and values provide a context for the process of clarification and integration.

There are two philosophical approaches to ethics. One school of thought focuses on the recognition and understanding of a real, physical, external world. The human enterprise in understanding this “reality” is to discover the objective laws or principles that structure it. This is the **deontological** school. A second approach does not acknowledge the existence of a world external to human consciousness. This school does not recognize the existence of independent

objective laws or rules which govern or structure choices. A person's judgment or conscience is the sole guide for determining what is right or wrong. This is the **teleological** approach to ethics. The merits of both schools will be considered during the term.

Additionally, our ideas about values, and therefore ethical and moral conduct, spring from multiple sources. Historical, cultural, and political experience have been shaped by multiple and diverse traditions, philosophies, ideologies, epistemologies and professional standards. The mixing of ethical criteria from this multiplicity of sources adds to the challenge of forming and carrying out public programs and policies. Paradoxically our dependence on clear ethical knowledge and action increases as public problems become more numerous, complicated and fast-paced.

CLASS SESSIONS: Class sessions will be conducted in seminar format. The utilization of reading resources in class discussions and participate effectively in the consideration of issues, concepts, tools and theoretical ideas is expected. The discussions will build from concepts to application in understanding ethical concepts, processes and decisions. Students are expected to be self-directed learners and participants, challenging the materials and instructor with regard to the utility and long-term value of the course content.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: The first assignment is an ungraded short paper of 2-3 pages in length that is due on June 8th. It is intended simply to inform the course discussion by getting everyone to think through his or her perceptions of ethics and public administration. The focus of the paper is two specific questions: 1) why should an ethics course be part of an MPA degree and 2) what should it address? Your paper should attempt to provide clear and precise answers to these questions but does not have to be based on extensive research. It can be informed by course readings and other sources, as you feel appropriate. Please e-mail the paper to the instructor by 1:30 p.m. on February 1st. Bring a copy with you to class.

In addition, students will write two short (3-5-page) papers and one longer analytical paper (10-15 pages).

The shorter papers will focus on cases assigned for the course. The first paper will address a case provided by the instructor. The second will focus on a case chosen by the student. In the second case, the student should choose a case that has appeared in the national media concerning ethical issues raised by individual and/or organizational actions and provide a brief summary and analysis of the ethical issues raised. An example would be the recent firing of the National Park Police Chief. The papers are due as indicated on the syllabus. They will be graded and returned the week after they are submitted. Selected papers will be read in class by their authors for discussion and understanding of their strengths and how others can improve their efforts.

The final paper focuses on the ethical issues raised in a policy area chosen from the four available policy texts. The choice of policy topic is the student's. The paper should be appropriately documented and reflect both the existing literature and current sources. The



June 8<sup>th</sup>

**Role of Ethics Education in Public Administration Programs and Practice**

**Reading:** Any source dealing with the ethics statement and standards of a recognized public administration association, e.g., American Society for Public Administration, ICMA, NACO, American Planning Association, etc.

Gortner, "Values and Ethics" (handout)

**Guest Presentation:** Grace Reidy, FHWA

**Short paper due**

June 13<sup>th</sup>

**Values and Ethics in Public Administration**

**Readings:**

Gortner, All

Sayre, "Trends of a Decade in Administration Values" (Bruce)

June 15<sup>th</sup>

**Perspectives on Ethics: Understanding its dimensions and absence**

**Reading:**

Guy and Balfour, to be assigned

June 20<sup>th</sup>

**Perspectives on Ethics: Understanding its dimensions and absence**

**Reading:**

Guy and Balfour, to be assigned

**First Short Paper**

June 22<sup>nd</sup>

**Concepts of Ethics and Practice**

Rohr, to be assigned

June 27<sup>th</sup>

**Concepts of Ethics and Practice (continued)**

Rohr, to be assigned

June 29<sup>th</sup>

**Administrative Responsibility**

**Reading:**

Bruce, Parts 1 and 3

**Second paper due**

July 4<sup>th</sup>

**Holiday**

July 6<sup>th</sup>

**Solving Ethical Dilemmas**

**Reading:**

Bruce, Parts 2, 5 and 6

July 11<sup>th</sup>

**Ethics and Leadership: The Ultimate Issue**

Bruce, Part 7

Burns, "The Structure of Moral leadership" (handout)

July 13<sup>th</sup>

Policy Paper Presentations

July 18<sup>th</sup>

Policy Paper Presentations

July 20<sup>th</sup>

Policy Paper Presentations

July 25<sup>th</sup>

Policy Paper Presentations

July 27<sup>th</sup>

No Class – Final Paper Due

### **HONOR CODE POLICY**

The Honor Code policy endorsed by the members of the Department of Public and International Affairs relative to the types of academic work indicated below is set out in the appropriate paragraphs:

- Quizzes, tests and examinations. No help may be given or received by students when taking quizzes, tests, or examinations, whatever the type or wherever taken, unless the instructor specifically permits deviation from this standard.
- Course Requirements: All work submitted to fulfill course requirements is to be solely the product of the individual(s) whose name(s) appears on it. Except with permission of the instructor, no recourse is to be had to projects, papers, lab reports or any other written work previously prepared by another student, and except with permission of the instructor no paper or work of any type submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of another course may be used a second time to satisfy a requirement of any course in the Department of Public and International Affairs. No assistance is to be obtained from commercial organizations which sell or lease research help or written papers. With respect to all written work as appropriate, proper footnotes and attribution are required.