

PUAD 6578: Public Finance and Budgeting

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Class Room: *online*

Course Description¹

Budgeting at all levels of government is a complex process that requires a tremendous amount of time, energy, and political capital. This course will help you understand the difference between public and private budgeting and why the government cannot function like a household. The class examines the budget process at all levels. To enhance student learning, this course utilizes case studies that will (a) allow the student to learn about the budget process first hand by studying their local government and (b) test the student's mastery of course material by presenting them with a budget problem from an actual municipality and having them solve the problem.

This course is also designed to help students with an interest in public budgeting to work through a research design that may be used later in the program as the foundation to their capstone project or thesis. This project will allow the student to develop a research question by completing a thorough review of the literature.

The course also gives the students a cursory overview of the policy process. Students completing this course will be able to identify policy problems, formulate alternatives, and evaluate the alternatives to develop a feasible solution. These skills will be enhanced by taking PUAD 6601.

Required Readings

Lee, Robert D., Jr., Ronald W. Johnson, and Philip G. Joyce. 2013. *Public Budgeting Systems*, 9th Edition. Jones & Bartlett Learning.

Other readings are outlined in the course schedule below. These readings will be available in GeorgiaView. These readings will supplement the material in the textbook and will be, in most cases, a starting point for the literature review for the research design assignment.

Finally, I strongly encourage students to subscribe to [Governing magazine](#). The subscription is free and is offered in print or digital format.

¹I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus at any time. Students will be notified when changes are made.

Course Objectives

Students enrolled in Georgia College’s MPA program are expected to show competency in several areas by the time they graduate. Therefore, a set of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) that relate to (and in some cases enhance) NASPAA Universal Competencies were established for students in the program. The SLOs and NASPAA Universal Competencies are listed below. Those highlighted represent the outcomes and competencies students will be assessed on and are required to meet in order to succeed in this course.

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of challenges and constraints relevant to governance and external factors.
2. Demonstrate an ability to participate in the policy process, communicate policy alternatives, and work effectively with government, nonprofit institutions, corporations, and community stakeholders.
3. *Demonstrate an ability to define, frame, think critically about and analyze important problems.*
4. *Demonstrates an ability to utilize analytical tools to analyze, present, and interpret data, including appropriate design, statistical, and evaluative techniques for both organization decision making and policy decisions.*
5. Demonstrates an ability to identify public service values and to then systematically apply these values to identify appropriate course of action.
6. Demonstrates an ability to communicate effectively and professionally to diverse audience.

NASPAA Universal Competencies

1. To lead and manage in public governance (demonstrate an understanding of challenges and constraints relevant to governance and external factors).
2. To participate in and contribute to the policy process (demonstrate an ability to participate in the policy process, communicate policy alternatives, and work effectively with government, non-profit institutions, corporations, and community stakeholders).
3. *To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions (a. demonstrate an ability to define, frame, think critically about, and analyze important problems; b. demonstrate an ability to utilize analytical tools to analyze, present, and interpret data, including appropriate design, statistical, and evaluative techniques for both organization decision making and policy decision).*
4. To articulate and apply public values perspective (demonstrates an ability to identify public service values and to then systematically apply these values to identify appropriate course of action).
5. To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry (demonstrates an ability to communicate effectively and professionally to diverse audiences).

Course Assignments

Case Study (Due March 4): You will select a local municipality and write a report on how they have managed their budget over the last 10 years, with a special emphasis on how they handled the years immediately after the 2008 economic recession. The goal of this project is to have you meet with a local budget executive and learn first hand about the budgetary process at the local level. You should also identify, preferably during your interview, one budgetary problem (or puzzle) the municipality is attempting to solve. For example, Milledgeville has recently increased garbage fees after a new contract with the waste disposal company. Many municipalities are also dealing with the “if you build it, they will come” problem where they would like to invest in infrastructure to attract new business, but run the risk of using political capital and getting little return on the investment. Be sure to identify at least one problem the municipality is facing as you will use it in the policy analysis assignment.

Research Design (Due April 1): You must draft an original, complete research design on a topic of public finance and budgeting. You can use this project in the future for an independent research paper or for a capstone level project. *Original* means it cannot be something you have used or are currently using in another course. *Complete* means it has the following components:

1. Introduction
2. Literature Review
3. Research Question
4. Hypothesis

Final Project (Due May 6): You will be presented with a real problem that must be solved. You will take on the role of policy analyst and submit a long-term budgetary plan to a small town enduring financial hardship. This project will test your mastery of the budgetary process. Much like the policy analysis assignment above, you are not expected to display a mastery of policy analysis, but you should attempt to find feasible, creative solutions to the problems facing the municipality in the case study. This assignment will require you to do outside research on budgetary solutions. This project is frustrating and will try your patience, but I assure you it can be completed and will be a rewarding experience. I was presented with the case study as an undergraduate and hated every minute of it, but in the end I learned a lot and gained valuable experience, ultimately understanding the value of the assignment (obviously, or I would not assign it). The key is to think creatively and come up with how you think the town is best served. Are you like Leslie Knope? Maybe you want to [implement a new tax](#), which is fine, but keep in mind the [cost-benefit relationship](#) and the [political capital at stake](#). Maybe you are more like Ron Swanson instead and believe that [government doesn't matter](#). If that's the case, you may want to [cut all services](#).

This project will be a group project. Groups will be announced early in the semester. Please email me if you have someone you want to work with (or someone you would rather not work with).

Final Exam (May 9): You will have a 2 hour final exam that will assess your ability to recall key concepts from the book (so take good notes and attend/watch the WebEx sessions). The exam will consist of short answer and essay questions. The exam will begin on May 9 at 7:00pm and will be taken online in GeorgiaView.

Specification Grading

Specification grading is something I am trying for the first time this semester. All of your assignments will be graded as Pass/Fail and you will know exactly what is required for a passing grade. The purpose for this is to (hopefully) avoid the subjectivity of grading and to save you the urge to email asking why your paper was a 93 instead of a 97 or an 84 instead of a 90. Numerical grading, even with a strong rubric, is challenging and often inconsistent. Therefore, we will use specification grading and you get to determine your final grade in the class by completing one of the following “bundles.” The bundles must be completed as prescribed, i.e., you do not get to swap assignments. For example, if you complete the case study, the policy analysis, and the final exam with a “Sat” you will still fail the course. You **MUST** complete the bundle as specified. Finally, I will give students the opportunity to revise and resubmit assignments that are borderline (which I realize is subjective, but I am doing my best). Students that receive an “R & R” will be given detailed feedback on how to make their assignment satisfactory and will be given one week to resubmit after the feedback is delivered.

Bundle	Satisfactory Grade on:
A	Case Study, Research Design, Final Project, & Final Exam
B	Case Study, Final Project, & Final Exam
C	Final Project & Final Exam
D	Final Project
F	None of the above

Course Policies:

- **Office Hours and Contact:** Office hours are stated on the front page of the syllabus. I will be in my office to assist students during the times listed UNLESS an emergency arises in which case I will notify students. This is an online class and many of you are not in the area so I am also able to meet by appointment via phone or WebEx. Students can contact me via email (keith.lee@gcsu.edu) or GeorgiaView, though email is preferred.
- **Late Policy:** No assignments will be accepted after the due date. Every assignment will be posted with ample time to complete them, thus a medical/family emergency on the due date is not an acceptable excuse. Get your work done early and you should not have any issues.
- **Attendance and Absences:** There is not an attendance policy for this course, however it is the student’s responsibility to watch all recorded WebEx recordings they miss.
- **Academic dishonesty:** Cheating, either on the exam or in the form of plagiarism, will not be tolerated and will result in an “F” in the course and a recommendation to the MPA coordinator that you be dismissed from the program. This class will use plagiarism detection via GeorgiaView.
- Please read these additional [common syllabus statements](#) provided by Georgia College.

Class Schedule

The reading schedule below should be adhered to whether you attend Wednesday sessions or not. “Chapter X” refers to the textbook chapter in Lee, Johnson, & Joyce (2013). You’ll also need to read the article after the “;” as we will be discussing it during the WebEx session. I tried to ensure the articles were at least tangentially related to the textbook topic, but some cases may require a little more imagination than others. However, my primary objective was to limit the supplemental reading to one article per week rather than having multiple articles one week and then multiple weeks without any supplemental reading.

Week 00, 01/15 - 01/17: Course Introduction

- WebEx Session 01/17 at 7:00 pm
- Chapter 1; Syllabus

Week 01, 01/18 - 01/24: The Public Sector in Perspective

- WebEx Session 01/24 at 7:00 pm
- Chapter 2; [Mitchell & Thurmaier \(2012\)](#)

Week 02, 01/25 - 01/31: Government, the Economy, and Economic Development

- WebEx Session 01/31 at 7:00 pm
- Chapter 3; [Kelly & Rivenbark \(2008\)](#)

Week 03, 02/01 - 02/07: Budget Cycles

- WebEx Session 02/07 at 7:00 pm
- Chapter 4; [Hou \(2006\)](#)

Week 04, 02/08 - 02/14: Budgeting for Revenues - Income Taxes, Payroll Taxes, and Property Taxes

- WebEx Session 02/14 at 7:00 pm
- Chapter 5; [Lowry, Alt, & Ferree \(1998\)](#)

Week 05, 02/15 - 02/21: Budgeting for Revenues - Transaction-Based Revenue Sources

- WebEx Session 02/21 at 7:00 pm
- Chapter 6; [Berner \(2005\)](#)

Week 06, 02/22 - 02/28: Budget Preparation - The Expenditure Side

- WebEx Session 02/28 at 7:00 pm
- Chapter 7; [Eskridge & French \(2011\)](#)

Week 07, 03/01 - 03/07: Budget Preparation - The Decision Process

- WebEx Session 03/07 at 7:00 pm
- Chapter 8; [Posner \(2011\)](#)

Week 08, 03/08 - 03/14: Budget Approval - The Role of the Legislature

- WebEx Session 03/14 at 7:00 pm
- Chapter 9; [Goodman \(2008\)](#)

Week 09, 03/15 - 03/21: No Class - Spring Break

- No WebEx Session
- No Reading

Week 10, 03/22 - 03/28: Budget Approval - The U.S. Congress

- WebEx Session 03/28 at 7:00 pm
- Chapter 10; [Meyers \(2014\)](#)

Week 11, 03/29 - 04/04: Budget Execution

- WebEx Session 04/04 at 7:00 pm
- Chapter 11; [Dougherty, Klase, & Song \(2003\)](#)

Week 12, 04/05 - 04/11: Financial Management - Accounting, Reporting, and Auditing

- WebEx Session 04/11 at 7:00 pm
- Chapter 12; [LaPlante \(2011\)](#)

Week 13, 04/12 - 04/18: Capital Assets - Planning and Budgeting, Analysis, and Management

- WebEx Session 04/18 at 7:00 pm
- Chapter 13; [Srithongrung & Kriz \(2014\)](#)

Week 14, 04/19 - 04/25: Capital Finance and Debt Management

- WebEx Session 04/25 at 7:00 pm
- Chapter 14; [Wang & Hou \(2009\)](#)

Week 15, 04/26 - 05/02: Intergovernmental Relations

- WebEx Session 05/02 at 7:00 pm
- Chapter 15; [Hamilton, Miller, & Paytas \(2004\)](#)