

POLS 4950: Knope, Swanson, and Public Service

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Course Description¹

This course uses the NBC sitcom *Parks & Recreation* to explore the concepts of traditional public administration, new public management, and what Denhart and Denhart refer to as the new public service. The traditional public admin model evolved dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s. The new model, New Public Management, approached public service as a business and used private sector strategies to improve efficiency. New Public Service provides a competing approach that calls for a reaffirmation of public values that puts public interest first.

Leslie Knope embodies the new public service and works tirelessly to meet citizen needs. Ron Swanson, on the other hand, is an anti-government libertarian that challenges Knope's attempts to grow government to serve citizens, arguing government is the problem. Chris Traeger and Ben Wyatt exemplify new public management principles when they show up in Pawnee to conduct an audit.

Course Readings

The book required for this course is available online via the library. Use this link to access the book: [The New Public Service](#)

Bozeman's *Public Values and Public Interest* is recommended to students interested in a more theoretical challenge to New Public Management.

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester you will be able to:

- Differentiate between New Public Service, New Public Management, and Old Public Administration
- Examine various scenarios and apply concepts from the text

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

Course Assignments

Chapter Summaries: You will draft a summary of the chapter that synthesizes the core concepts and analyzes the arguments presented.

Concept Application: You will apply the concepts discussed in specific chapters to various episodes of Parks & Recreation. The number of episodes will vary per concept.

Alternative Strategies: You will discuss the alternative strategies for citizen engagement found in chapter 10 and provide examples from various episodes that demonstrate the strategy. Not all strategies will be exemplified.

Short Essay: You will write a 4-6 page essay discussing the differences between the Old Public Administration, New Public Management, and New Public Service providing at least seven examples from the show that exemplify these models.

Watch Parks & Rec: You will need to watch a number of episodes to complete the course. The episode guide below lists the specific episodes by number and title (1.2 is season 1 episode 2). Episodes can be viewed on Netflix.

Specification Grading

All of your assignments will be graded as Sat/Unsat. 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. You **MUST** complete the bundle as specified. Note, 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	Chapter Summaries (All Chapters), Concept Application (Chs. 3, 4, 7, 9), Alternative Strategies
B	Chapter Summaries (Chs. 3, 4, 7, 9, 10), Concept Application (Chs. 3, 4, 7, 9), Alternative Strategies
C	Concept Application (Chs. 3, 4, 7, 9), Alternative Strategies
D	Short Essay
F	None of the above

Course Policies:

- **Office Hours and Contact:** This is an online class and I do not have regular office hours. However, we can meet face-to-face if you are in town or via phone/WebEx. Please use my GCSU email (listed on the first page) for all class communications.
- **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:** This class does not have an attendance policy.
- **Academic dishonesty:** Cheating, including plagiarism, will not be tolerated and will result in an “F” in the course. This class will use plagiarism detection via GeorgiaView. Furthermore, you are not allowed to use a paper you submitted in another course. You are free to build on an idea explored in another course, but the writing must be original.
- Please read these additional [common syllabus statements](#) provided by Georgia College.

Episode Guide

1.1: *Pilot*

Ann Perkins (Rashida Jones) attends a town meeting to ask that a construction pit be filled in after her boyfriend, Andy (Chris Pratt), fell into it and broke his legs. Leslie Knope (Amy Poehler), a mid-level bureaucrat in the Pawnee parks and recreation department, promises to help turn the pit into a beautiful park. She is helped by Tom Haverford (Aziz Ansari) and her former lover, city planner Mark Brendanawicz (Paul Schneider). Her boss, Ron Swanson (Nick Offerman), who believes in as little government interference as possible, initially refuses to greenlight the project. But Mark, impressed with Leslie’s optimism, convinces Ron to approve it by calling in a favor.

1.2: *Canvassing*

Leslie and the pit subcommittee canvas neighborhood houses to generate support for her park project and enroll attendees for an upcoming town meeting. The plan does not go as expected, especially when Tom detaches from the group and starts using questionable tactics, such as seeking favors from developers in return for preferential treatment. Leslie hopes the public meeting will impress her mother, local school official Marlene Griggs-Knope (Pamela Reed). However, the park’s supporters do not attend and opponents turn out in large numbers to voice their disapproval. The project is nearly voted down, but Leslie resorts to a filibuster to save it.

1.4: *Boys Club*

As Andy cleans up the house to surprise Ann, Leslie tries to infiltrate the boys’ club of politics by crashing an after-work gathering at Pawnee Town Hall. Trying to fit in, she opens a gift basket worth more than \$25, breaking the local government ethics laws. She apologetically refers Pawnee officials to a website about the pit to highlight her accomplishments, but gets in more trouble when underage intern April Ludgate (Aubrey Plaza) posts a video of herself drinking on the site. Leslie is called before an ethics committee, but is let off with a warning after Ron, who despises the town’s disciplinary process, defends her. Leslie is pleased when Mark tells her the warning officially makes her a member of the boys’ club.

2.15: *Sweetums*

The Parks Department makes a deal with a local company to sell energy snacks in all of the Pawnee parks. Leslie tries to veto the deal when she later learns how unhealthy the snacks are. Mark reluctantly helps Tom move out of his house.

2.23: *The Master Plan*

Leslie's new park plans are put on hold by a visit from two state auditors, Chris Traeger (Rob Lowe) and Ben Wyatt (Adam Scott), causing Leslie disappointment. April anticipates advancing her relationship with Andy at her 21st birthday party held at the Snakehole Lounge, while Ann and Mark both deal with their recent break-up in different ways.

2.24: *Freddy Spaghetti*

Ben and Chris have effectively shut down the government due to the Pawnee fiscal crisis, leading the closure of all the parks and the cancellation of a children's concert performed by the beloved Freddy Spaghetti. Leslie recruits the Parks Department to put on the concert anyway, leading to a confrontation with Ben. Meanwhile, Andy doesn't know how to deal with some unexpected romantic attention by Ann, which causes problems with April and Mark takes a job in the private sector and leaves the government.

4.9: *The Trial of Leslie Knope*

Leslie and Ben finally tell Chris about their relationship, leading to Leslie's trial by the board to see whether she took advantage of him to get ahead. Ann, Ron, April, Andy, Donna, and Jerry sit in as witnesses to help prove her innocence, while Chris becomes their enemy.

4.10: *Citizen Knope*

When Chris bans a suspended Leslie from trying to do her job in any way, Leslie becomes a super-organizer for citizen-based projects in Pawnee. The entire staff endeavors to create the most thoughtful present for Leslie they can think of, in order to pay her back for her many years of unprecedentedly thoughtful presents. Ben Wyatt goes on distressing private sector job interviews before getting good advice from a surprising source. Leslie's City Council campaign suffers crippling losses-until her friends and colleagues unite anew to help her out.

4.19: *Live Ammo*

Leslie discovers that the Parks Department budget is about to be cut, and she later meets the City Council member (Bradley Whitford) she is running to replace. Chris and Ron visit a meditation center. Chris learns that if Newport wins, he's fired as city manager.

5.2: *Soda Tax*

Leslie faces obstacles while trying to pass a soda tax, while Andy trains for his upcoming police physical examination. In Washington, D.C., Ben tries to connect with his interns.

5.3: *How a Bill Becomes a Law*

Leslie negotiates with a hateful fellow City Councilman to pass a bill extending public pool hours. Chris creates a 3-1-1 hotline for citizens to call with their problems leading Ron to help a citizen (Diane) fix a pothole in front of her house. In Washington, D.C., Ben and April try to take a road trip to visit Leslie and Andy.

5.16: *Bailout*

Leslie tries to save a video store from going out of business, declaring it a cultural and historical landmark, but the government bailout has an adverse effect. Meanwhile, Chris helps Tom with a difficult employee, and Ann is determined to make April her friend.

5.21: *Swing Vote*

Ron issues some budget cuts and Leslie finds herself going overboard to save a local mini-golf facility, trying to win the vote of Councilman Jamm to do so. Tom asks Ann for relationship advice when he can't handle his horrible girlfriend.

5.22: *Are You Better Off?*

At the end of her first year as a city councilwoman, Leslie's changes in the town prove to be unpopular and several locals launch a campaign to have her recalled from office. Andy brings Burt Macklin back to help find the owner of a positive pregnancy test. Tom looks to further his business but faces competition.