The MPA Comprehensive Exam consists of two parts; a core course section and an integrative section. On exam day you will answer two core questions and one integrative question. All possible questions are listed below. There are four questions listed for each core course. One question for each core course will be on the exam. On the day of the exam you will select two course based questions to answer.

Note: Those who have a concentration in Public Financial Management MUST answer the 615 and 663 questions and those who have a concentration in Leadership MUST answer the 662 and 664 questions.

After the core questions below there is a list of five integrative case study questions. For the exam you will be randomly assigned ONE of the integrative questions to answer. That means you need to prepare for all of them.

Please contact the MPA Coordinator, Jonathan Anderson, with any questions about the process. jfanders@csusb.edu

Course Based Questions

PA 603 Research Methods in Administration

1. Suppose you want to examine why people choose to enter a public sector career. Describe how you research this question by applying the traditional scientific method for social science research.

2. The City’s Public Works Department is considering whether to run a series of focus groups to investigate citizen’s willingness to pay for renovating the city’s Park and Ride parking lot for Amtrak. The Department Director needs your advice about a) the merits and limitations of focus groups, b) the ethical and political issues related to focus groups, and c) your recommendations to deal with those issues.

3. You are the Director of the Health Department of Central City. There have been a rash of food poisoning incidents at local restaurants, and the City Council wants to know how well you are doing your job of inspecting local facilities. The City has never had performance measures before and your job is to construct performance measures for the Health Department. Prepare a memo for the City Council that outlines the issues to consider including sampling approaches, ethical concerns, researcher impact, and general validity that you must consider. Propose a methodology that will be valid and replicable.
4. You are in a staff meeting where a study is presented purporting to show that your city is far below the national average of citizen satisfaction for law enforcement. The study used both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interview) methods. You are told that the measures are statistically significant, and that the city needs to take action. Discuss what questions you will ask about the research to determine if it is valid.

PA 611 Public Administration Theory and Practice

1. In a 1947 speech Winston Churchill said “it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.” Democracy means rule by the people, but the people are not experts. Public managers are the experts on their area of policy. Discuss how we can achieve democracy, efficiency and effectiveness government administration. What makes democracy ‘work’ within the context of current day public administration?

2. New Public Administration and New Public Management may be seen as competing paradigms for public administration. Identify the main themes of each and their theoretical rationales. What are the arguments of the detractors of each? Provide at least two real world examples of each in government today.

3. In recent years we have witnessed an increased number of efforts to make public bureaucracies more accountable and responsive. Accountability has indeed become a central value in public administration. Please, provide detailed answers to the following questions (be specific in your answers):
   a) What are some of the more important reasons behind this drive to make bureaucracies more accountable?
   b) Whom should public bureaucracies be accountable to?
   c) What are some means through which bureaucracies can be held accountable?
   d) What would be the “ideal” results of having more accountable bureaucracies?

4. In an increasingly multicultural, globalized, and complex world, ethical public administration becomes harder to pinpoint. Discuss three major theorists on ethics in society and government, and how adoption might help to resolve the problem of ethics. Please support your discussion with real world examples.

PA 615 Public Financial Management

1. Analyze and explain why cash management is both important and in the public interest. What tradeoffs are involved in developing an effective cash management strategy?

2. Explain and critique the role of public procurement in public financial management. What makes an effective public procurement program?
3. In light of the recent recession, assessing the financial conditions of local government is becoming a common practice. Discuss the importance of a financial condition assessment from the perspective of public managers, elected officials, the public and the business community. Identify the tools public managers commonly use to assess financial conditions. Finally, identify four indicators to assess the financial condition of a local government and what each indicator means.

4. You have recently been elected to the school board based in large part on the promises you made to the residents of the jurisdiction to:
   a) Decrease the student-teacher ratio in all schools in the district,
   b) Ensure that 50 percent of the classrooms had “smart technologies,” and
   c) Plan to build a new high school within the next 3 to 5 years.

You made these assertions based upon the fact that property values had risen at a significant rate thus increasing the amount of property tax revenue. Additionally, several large corporations (Mercedes-Benz, Target and Samsung) were expected to open in the community. After tax-freezes for these corporations could not be negotiated, they each decided to open their offices elsewhere. This has substantially reduced the revenue that you – and the city - expected when you made your campaign promises.

While you would still like to honor your campaign pledges, the residents are unlikely to pass another sales and use tax increase, nor an increase in the property tax rate. You are now considering a capital appreciation bond (CAB) because the credit rating in the city will not allow you to pursue a current interest bond.

Discuss whether or not this is an appropriate time to pursue a CAB? If so why? What factors must be considered prior to selecting this method of debt financing? If this is not the appropriate time to pursue a CAB, discuss what you plan to tell residents of the community to whom you made the campaign promises. Finally, discuss other capital financing alternatives.

**PA 650 Public Sector MIS**

1. Some scholars view information technology as a central driving force to social changes, while others see technology as a result of society and a tool for human race. Adopting the lens of technological or social determinism, discuss whether and why you agree or disagree with the two different views. Offer public administration examples to support your arguments.

2. Suppose you are the newly hired director of the Information System (IS) Department in City A. Your department provides system support to all units in the City government. In the past the City has not engaged in IS strategic planning. You propose to develop an IS strategy (or an IS strategic plan) for the city. Please advise your department why an IS strategy (or strategic plan) is necessary and what components an IS strategy (or strategic plan) should include. Offer at least three managerial or architectural guidelines for developing the IS strategy (or strategic plan).
3. You are the city manager of a small city. Your city council recently approved your request for overhauling the city’s official website, which was originally developed and maintained by your staff, and which could no longer meet citizens’ needs. The city council needs your advice on whether the city should renovate the website in-house or by contracting out. Please advise them the advantages and disadvantages of developing in-house and outsourcing respectively. In lieu of your city’s situation, what are the factors should be considered in making the decision.

4. You are the IT director of City B. The county sheriff is proposing an information sharing system among law enforcement agencies in the county to facilitate cross-jurisdictional information sharing to combat crimes and terrorism. Your city manager wants to know more about this issue. Compose a memo specifying:
   a) what information sharing is about,
   b) two information sharing models for consideration,
   c) three challenges and three facilitating factors to information sharing,
   d) at least two best practices for information sharing, and
   e) describe your vision of success to the city manager.

PA 662 Human Resource Management in the Public Sector

1. Recent reform trends in human resource management have focused on compensation, benefits and position management. Identify the civil service framework of protections in each of these three areas followed by the reform critique arguing why each protection should be abolished. Provide contemporary examples.

2. Discuss the use of selection tests (anything used to evaluate, including education and experience documents are “tests”) using three examples:
   a) a front-line junior office assistant in a large organization,
   b) a public safety employee who will have rank, and
   c) an agency chief executive officer.

   (This must be presented as an essay, not a simple listing of tests.)

3. Describe three different approaches to employee performance appraisal and identify the strengths and weaknesses of each. Describe a relatively thorough performance appraisal system with at least five components.

4. Salary increases are important to all employees, and there are varieties of philosophies that can be used, individually or together, as justification. Discuss the different rationales for salary increases (e.g., time-in-service or seniority increases, often referred to as step increases). What are the philosophical advantages/disadvantages (e.g., stimulate loyalty/demotivate creativity) related to the use of different types of salary increases?
PA 663 Public Budgeting and Finance

1. A new pro-business, pro-jobs city council majority takes office shortly in the City of Anywhere. The City Manager has assigned you to prepare a briefing paper that
   a) explains the key factors spurring competition among cities and counties for new businesses,
   b) reviews economic concerns about the inefficiencies of local business tax incentives,
   c) summarizes the primary factors affecting business location decisions in the initial search for possible sites, and
   d) critiques two policy options that have been suggested for business investment.

2. Aaron Wildavsky famously asserted “a normative theory of budgeting would be a comprehensive and specific political theory detailing what the government’s activities ought to be at a particular time.” That is, a theory of budgeting is a theory of politics. Discuss in detail the point of Wildavsky’s assertion. Do you agree or disagree? (Whether you agree or disagree with Wildavsky is not the issue.) Be clear about your logic and take a stand on the issue. Fully explain and logically justify your position.

3. V.O. Key asked the timeless question, “On what basis shall it be decided to allocate X dollars to activity A instead of activity B?” Discuss why this question has been so difficult to definitively answer for the past 75 years? Develop a framework (model) or a set of criteria that can help public managers determine which of the following areas--public safety, education or economic development-- the city of San Bernardino should primarily focus on with its available resources. Your answer should include an explanation supporting the area(s) where you decide resources should be allocated while also discussing why you decide resources should not be allocated to other area(s).

4. Identify and discuss four benefits and four drawbacks to the property tax. Your answer should include reasons both for its popularity and unpopularity. Discuss whether or not you foresee California ever eliminating or amending Proposition 13. Explain the rationale for your answer.

PA 664 Comprehensive Exam Questions

1. Critically analyze and discuss the issues involved in effectively communicating internally and externally in a public organization from an upper manager’s perspective.

2. A critical part of the role of public and nonprofit management is to get the best qualitative and quantitative performance from the fewest resources, while serving the public interest. Market-based strategies are among the tools available to achieve this.

As a public service manager, you are tasked with preparing an option analysis and action recommendation(s) for city residential refuse pick-up. Explain in a city council report how you would explore at least two market-based alternatives to the current city employee provided refuse system. What criteria would you propose the council apply to
the review of the current service delivery and selection of the most beneficial alternative service direction for the future?

3. “Leadership mobilizes, naked power coerces” (Burns, 1978, p. 439). Using either the “transformational” or the “administrative conservator” approach to leadership, critically analyze how leading public organizations involves a blend of managing results, managing relationships, as well as managing in the public interest ethically. Discuss each theme separately. Then, analyze how these themes are complementary while identifying any tension points between them.

4. Identify and critically analyze the major environmental forces that are driving changes in leadership and management of local governments. What is the role of the public service manager versus elected policy maker in addressing these environmental forces?

PA 672 Administrative Regulation

1. Critics claim the bureaucracy is unchecked. While public agencies occasionally make unwise decisions, there are a number of checks and balances that contribute to effective oversight. Write a detailed essay (not a list) that describes the various checks that are in place to limit the federal bureaucracy. Tip: all three branches check the bureaucracy.

2. Because of the recent claims of excessive force by police, the issue of immunity has become a "hot" topic. Discuss the rationale for the major types of immunity that affect the public sector—immunity of the government itself (sovereign), and types of immunity for officials in government (absolute and qualified immunity). Discuss why immunity is sometimes withheld on purpose (by law) or is lost. Be sure to cite examples.

3. Administrative adjudication involves millions of cases in the federal government alone each year.
   a) Discuss the federal provisions for administrative hearings.
   b) Discuss the general appeals process within the agency or court system.

4. Discuss procedural due process in administrative process; what factors must be balanced by the courts (including the Supreme Court)? Provide at least three case examples that shed light on the principle of proportionality (e.g., Goss v Lopez); that is, the more substantial the outcome, the more due process may be required.

PA680 Public Policy Analysis

1. Understanding who stakeholders are in any given government program or public policy is extremely important. What makes someone an interested party? Another important component to policy making is problem definition. Analyze two real world
public problem examples from a stakeholder analysis. Discuss all of the possible direct and indirect stakeholders and their interest in the problem. How do they impact the outcome of problem definition and development?

2. In western policy analysis, rationality is at the center of decision making. Discuss the major components of the rational decisionmaking model. Now provide an overview of how policy is really made in a political world with pluralistic interests. Use one real world example to support your case.

3. Public policy making in emergency and crisis situations is growing in importance. Outline how policy is made in times of crisis and emergency. What are the major decisionmaking models used to help guide how decisions are made. What administrative structures can be put in place to ensure a strong response by government? Use one real world example to support your case.

4. In the U.S. federal system, power and authority are fragmented through the different levels of government. Compare and contrast how public policy is made at the municipal level versus the federal level. Use one real world example from each level of government to explore your analysis.

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**Integrative Questions**

**Question # 1  Leadership/Management**

1. You are the City Manager of the City of Anywhere. During your current mid-year budget review, you have learned that 20% of your anticipated general revenue will not be realized in the next fiscal year. You have called a meeting of your Department Directors to consider next fiscal year’s shortfall and propose a plan for the City Council’s action. Your plan should:

   a) Articulate the challenges that the City is facing and specify financial, human resource, managerial, and political objectives.
   b) Propose a detailed strategy to address the shortfall. Disclose and discuss two to three possible unintended consequences of your strategy.
   c) Develop a Plan B - or fail safe plan - that will keep essential services going in all circumstances.
   d) Address how your team will communicate with staff to lead the organization through the challenges.
   e) Address how you will explain the plan to the city council members and the public.
Question #2  Policy Process

You are an assistant to the City Manager for a medium sized city in Southern California. A new policy/law has been passed by the state legislature that will impact the city (select a policy issue that you are familiar with, e.g., reducing greenhouse gas emission by 20%). You need to develop a briefing paper for the city council, city manager, and staff that explains the policy in detail, including its development and possible implications for the city.

As part of this briefing you should:

a) Provide an overview of how the policy/law came to be – identifying the main stakeholders at the federal, state, and local levels.
b) Present a brief on the social, political, and economic context of the policy.
c) Analyze how the policy/law is likely to impact the city by applying the key steps of policy management.
d) Recommend an approach for the city to effectively implement the policy/legislation.

Question #3  Critical Thinking/ Problem Solving

You are the lead policy analyst for a Southern California municipality of approximately 200,000 people. This is a blue-collar city that has never been known to be particularly affluent. The past two years, due to an economic downturn, have been especially rough for the city. Over the past decade the nature of the local economy has also gone through significant changes. Historically, it was dominated by large labor intensive industries. Currently, however, most of the large employers are technology-driven and are not necessarily as labor intensive. The unemployment rate, which has traditionally fluctuated around 10%, has risen over the past two years to 20%. The worsening condition of the city has become the focal point of local and national attention.

The federal government has decided to award the municipality a $10 million grant to address the growing unemployment problem. The city council, however, is divided on how the funds should be spent. Half of the members believe that the funds should be spent on attracting new businesses. Their main argument is that new businesses will provide additional jobs. Such a strategy would also increase revenues for the city. The other half believes that money should be spent on education and job training. Their main argument is based on the fact that education leads to more innovation, which in turn creates more business opportunities and jobs.

You have been tasked with evaluating these two perspectives and providing a conclusive recommendation to the council for spending the grant money.

In your answer:
a) Clearly articulate the problem and identify the major stakeholder groups. What are their interests?
b) Identify an alternative explanation (other than the economic downturn) to the rise in the unemployment rate.
c) Define the management objectives and analyze the merits of both approaches (e.g., effectiveness, opportunity cost) in achieving the objectives. Do you have sufficient data or would you need additional information/research to make your decision? What additional information do you need and how would you go about obtaining/conducting it?
d) Make a recommendation and justify it.

**Question #4  Public Service Perspective**

You have worked as a public manager for over twenty years. You are proud of your public service and have been recognized by family and community for your efforts. Recently your nephew came to you for advice about a career in the public sector. Your nephew particularly wants to know:

a) How is management in the public sector different from the private sector?
b) What are the dilemmas of management in a democratic governance system?
c) What motivates you to work in the public sector and how do you keep motivated over the long term despite organizational and political challenges?
d) What are three major ethical issues for those choosing to work in the public sector? How would you address them?

**Question #5  Diversity/Communications**

It has been quite a month since you took over this troubled division as the manager where a culture war seems to have broken out. The administration is looking to you to not only calm things down, but also to ensure that any unprofessional behavior stops immediately. It is a tall order. The division does a lot of case work with the public so it has both individual case meetings in cubicles (although the vast majority are by letter, email and phone) and front-counter interactions.

Some of the issues at hand include the following:

a) A number of employees wear religious clothing or ornaments. There have been some complaints from the public about some of them. One employee’s cubicle has walls with religious pictures and shelves with religious icons on them. The same employee occasionally wears a pressed shirt that has the name of her religious group embroidered on the back in very large lettering.

b) Your predecessor allowed some employees to engage in religious activities in a spare room of the office. There are internal complaints about the separation of church
and state, and threats to complain outside the organization. The religious activities have been conducted during the noon lunch hour and an afternoon break around 3:30.

c) A conservative employee is offended by the behavior of a supervisor who jokingly says things like, “now girls,” and compliments people on their “apparel.” Your supervisor noted in a sneering tone that the employee in question is an “overbearing, judgmental religious bigot.”

d) A female employee has informed you that her new husband insists she start wearing a traditional set of religious clothing which conceals much of her face. She occasionally deals with the general public at the front counter. State law does not allow switching out positions based on religious garb in general, but it is unclear and legally untested whether this is an extreme or special case. You know that it will be upsetting to a number of the employees, and clients who are used to seeing the face of the person that they are talking to.

- Discuss the major managerial and legal issues that you must sort out before you decide on actions.
- What ethical and/or legal principles have to be balanced?
- Discuss the actions that you would take, including consultations.
- Discuss or amplify how you would show empathy and sensitivity while enforcing rules.
- Compose a single paragraph that you intend to send to employees as a reminder about civility, diversity, and professionalism. It should be aspirational in tone rather than rule-oriented (which you will address separately).