

PUAD 834 – Fall 2012 - Foundations Assignments
Neutral Expertise vs. Responsiveness Team Project

In class, we considered the concepts of **responsiveness** and **neutrality**. These values are connected and contrast with one another: each can be prioritized by society at varying points in time. “Failure to resolve this debate has led to a tug-of-war and frequently conflicting directions for and expectations of the civil service,” (Ingraham 1995). We examined historical and political developments that contributed to the changing attitudes about these values, including the growing complexity of public programs on the one hand (leading to a desire for exercise of neutral expertise) and perceptions of increasing insular organizations on the other (leading to a desire for enhanced responsiveness to political direction). Your task is to consider the contemporary balance of responsiveness and neutrality by “taking the pulse” of these concepts. Definitions and illustrations are provided below:

Responsiveness has been defined as, “the deep seated belief that government answers to the will of the people expressed through elected officials,” (Klingner and Nalbandian 2009). This value may be expressed, for instance, through budgetary decisions that include more appointed positions for public policy purposes. It may also be evidenced via efforts to exert additional control over bureaucratic decision-making. Further, limits on managerial flexibility signal an emphasis on responsiveness. Left unmediated, responsiveness can ultimately lead to patronage with “little regard for job qualifications,” (Ibid.)

Neutrality, on the other hand, involves the bureaucratic “application of skills and knowledge to public services that is unfettered by political considerations,” (Ingraham 1995). Neutrality may be illustrated via political statements that convey trust or confidence in bureaucratic expertise. Further, positioning careerists as policy advisors or organizational experts illustrates an emphasis on this value. Also, aims to develop bureaucratic leadership (and cultivate individual discretion) also underscore neutral expertise. Left unmediated, however, neutral expertise can ultimately lead to an insulated civil service that does not respond to “legitimate political direction,” (Ingraham 1995).

Your task is to “take the pulse” of these values today and prepare a brief report (no longer than 5 double-spaced pages) that examines their contemporary balance. As a team, you will examine historical, political, and social sources to address the question: **which is the dominant value today?** To begin, select a specific public context to help narrow your efforts. For instance, consider the balance between responsiveness and neutrality as it applies to public employees working in the domain of: economic development, education, energy management, environmental protection, food safety, health and human services, homeland security, justice, law enforcement, public works, transportation, (or other relevant context). You may examine the context from the local, state, and/or federal level.

Next, collect a total of 10-15 sources of information, with at least three sources in each of the following categories: 1) history, 2) politics, and 3) society. For the history category, you may draw upon news stories, publicly available data/documents, and other resources that speak to key events that shape the evolving role of bureaucracy. For the politics category, identify and examine messages and/or directives from elected (or campaigning) officials at the federal, state, or local level. For the society component, you may conduct brief interviews with friends/family members/coworkers, examine blog posts (or Letters to the Editor), or utilize social media analysis tools (like Monitter) to identify trends in community dialogue. Your completed report should tell a cohesive story about the value balance in your selected context and identify the dominant contemporary value, based on information collected. Remember to include references for all cited resources. This assignment is due via Blackboard by 9/25.