

Fall 2025
PADM 530-020/021
Ethics in Public Administration
Wednesday 6 - 8:45 pm
Mitchell Hall 107 & Online MAXUNM Canvas

Instructor: Roli Varma

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Office Hours: Tuesday & Wednesday 4 pm to 6 pm and by appointment.

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Course Description

Teaching and learning ethics can be a challenging endeavor. This holds especially true for public administrators who encounter ethical dilemmas daily within the diverse field of their work. It is challenging for a single course to cover every conceivable ethical situation they may face. Rather than seeking to provide concrete answers for every scenario, the primary objective of this course is to equip students with the essential tools for addressing ethical challenges. Throughout this course, we will delve into a spectrum of ethical problems prevalent in public administration and explore various perspectives on how to navigate these issues. Additionally, we will delve into practical strategies and insights for handling unique situations that may arise during students' professional careers. By the conclusion of this course, students should emerge with heightened confidence in their ability to confront ethical dilemmas in the workplace.

This course is designed to scrutinize the ethical dimensions of the public administrative role. Our focus will be on recognizing and contemplating the ethical obligations inherent to public administrators while also addressing the ethical quandaries they encounter in the course of fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. We will delve into the personal efforts a public administrator can make to be an ethical practitioner and consider how the organizational context can influence their ethical behavior. Ultimately, we will underscore the significance of administrative ethics, not only in the preservation of democratic government but also in the promotion of effective governance.

Course Objectives

- To familiarize students with ethical standards and values in professional public administration.
- To cultivate an understanding of the ethical values, principles, standards, and codes guiding decision-making in public service.
- To develop students' ethical reasoning skills for identifying and resolving ethical dilemmas effectively.
- To raise awareness of contemporary administrative challenges and their ethical dimensions.

This course serves as a primer in ethics, provides opportunities for ethical analysis, and offers insight into the distinctive ethical challenges encountered by public administrators.

Students Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand fundamental ethical concepts and theories.
- Identify ethical obligations and dilemmas in public administration.
- Apply ethical decision-making methods to real-world scenarios.
- Propose strategies for fostering and sustaining ethical administrative behavior systematically.
- Explain the significance of administrative ethics in maintaining democratic government and promoting effective governance.
- Recognize ethical dimensions of social problems and evaluate ethical consequences of various solutions.
- Apply ethical criteria for decision-making and analyzing ethical dilemmas in public administration.
- Facilitate group discussions to mediate among conflicting ethical viewpoints, seeking solutions that accommodate multiple legitimate ethical considerations.

Technical Skills

In order to participate and succeed in this class, you will need to be able to perform the following basic technical tasks:

- Use Canvas (help documentation located in “Help”>”UNM Canvas Help Site” link on left course menu, and also at [Online Student Documentation](#)).
- Use the in-course web conferencing tool (Zoom)
- Download and install an application or plug in – required for participating in web conferencing sessions

Technical Requirements

- A high-speed Internet connection is highly recommended.
- Supported browsers include: [Detailed Supported Browsers and Operating Systems](#)
- Any computer capable of running a recently updated web browser should be sufficient to access your online course. However, bear in mind that processor speed, amount of RAM and Internet connection speed can **greatly** affect performance. Many locations offer free high-speed Internet access including [UNM’s Computer Pods](#).
- Microsoft Office products are available free for all UNM students (more information on the [UNM IT Software Distribution and Downloads page](#))

For UNM Canvas Technical Support: (505) 277-0857 (24/7) or visit the [Canvas Info Site](#)

Web Conferencing

For web conferencing, you will need:

- A headset with microphone, which are widely available at stores that sell electronics, at the UNM Bookstore or online.
- A high-speed internet connection is highly recommended for these sessions. Please test your wireless Internet connection for audio and/or video quality prior to *web conferencing*.
- For UNM Web Conference Technical Help: (505) 277-0857

Academic Integrity

- As a graduate student, you are expected to take considerable **responsibility** for the direction and quality of your own learning. You are expected to complete assignments on time, to speak up in class when you have questions and ideas, to contribute to a spirit of cooperative learning, and to demonstrate significant investment in your work. You should not miss classes, arrive late, or come unprepared for the class.
- Use **gender-free language** in your papers and class discussion. Unbiased language is as much a matter of accuracy as it is of fairness.
- **Academic Honesty**: All University policies regarding academic honesty apply to this course. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating or copying, plagiarism (claiming credit for the words or works of another from any type of source such as print, Internet or electronic database, or failing to cite the source), fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students are expected to be familiar with the UNM's [Policy on Academic Dishonesty](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Credit-hour statement

This is a three credit-hour course. Class meets for once for two and a half-hour session of direct instruction for 15 weeks during the Fall 2025 semester. Please plan for a *minimum* of six hours of out-of-class work (or homework, study, assignment completion, and class preparation) each week.

Support: Resources to support study skills and time management are available through Student Learning Support at the Center for Teaching and Learning.

Accommodations

UNM is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for students with documented disabilities. As your instructor, it is my objective to facilitate an inclusive classroom setting, in which students have full access and opportunity to participate. To engage in a confidential conversation about the process for requesting reasonable accommodations for this class and/or program, please contact Accessibility Resource Center at arcsrvs@unm.edu or by phone at 505-277-3506.

Support: Contact me at varma@unm.edu or in office/check-in hours and contact Accessibility Resource Center (<https://arc.unm.edu/>) at arcsrvs@unm.edu (505) 277-3506.

UAP 2720 and 2740. Our classroom and university should foster mutual respect, kindness, and support. If you have concerns about discrimination, harassment, or violence, please seek [support](#) and [report](#) incidents. Find confidential services at [LoboRESPECT Advocacy Center](#), the [Women's Resource Center](#), and the [LGBTQ Resource Center](#). UNM prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex (including gender, sex stereotyping, gender expression, and gender identity). All instructors are "responsible employees" who must [communicate reports](#) of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct and sexual violence to [Compliance, Ethics and Equal Opportunity](#). For more information, please see [UAP 2720](#) and [UAP 2740](#).

Religions and Faith Traditions: UNM promotes respect for all religions and faith traditions. Any student who is unable to attend classes or to participate in any examination, presentation, or assignment on a given day because of the observance of a major religious holiday or cultural observance, or due to related travel, is encouraged to speak with me before about an excused absence and opportunities to make up, without unreasonable burden, any work that has been missed. .

Title IX

To meet obligations under Title IX, UNM faculty, Teaching Assistants, and Graduate Assistants are considered “responsible employees.” This designation requires that any report of gender discrimination, which includes sexual harassment, sexual misconduct and sexual violence, made to a faculty member, TA, or GA must be reported to the Title IX Coordinator at the Office Compliance, Ethics and Equal Opportunity (ceeo.unm.edu). For more information on the campus policy regarding sexual misconduct and reporting, see: <https://policy.unm.edu/university-policies/2000/2740.html>.

Land Acknowledgement: Founded in 1889, the University of New Mexico sits on the traditional homelands of the Pueblo of Sandia. The original peoples of New Mexico Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache since time immemorial, have deep connections to the land and have made significant contributions to the broader community statewide. We honor the land itself and those who remain stewards of this land throughout the generations and also acknowledge our committed relationship to Indigenous peoples. We gratefully recognize our history.

Faculty Resource: Information provided by UNM’s Division for Equity and Inclusion can support building an inclusive classroom, <https://diverse.unm.edu/education-and-resources/programs/index.html>.

Citizenship and/or Immigration Status: All students are welcome in this class regardless of citizenship, residency, or immigration status. Your professor will respect your privacy if you choose to disclose your status. As for all students in the class, family emergency-related absences are normally excused with reasonable notice to the professor, as noted in the attendance guidelines above. UNM as an institution has made a core commitment to the success of all our students, including members of our undocumented community. The Administration’s welcome is found on our website: <http://undocumented.unm.edu/>.

Respectful and Responsible Learning: We all have shared responsibility for ensuring that learning occurs safely, honestly, and equitably. Submitting material as your own work that has been generated on a website, in a publication, by an artificial intelligence algorithm, by another person, or by breaking the rules of an assignment constitutes academic dishonesty. It is a student code of conduct violation that can lead to a disciplinary procedure. *Please ask me for help in finding the resources you need to be successful in this course. I can help you use study resources responsibly and effectively.* Off-campus paper writing services, problem- checkers and services, websites, and AIs can produce incorrect or misleading results. Learning the course material depends on completing and submitting your own work. UNM preserves and protects the integrity of the academic community through multiple policies including policies on student grievances (Faculty Handbook D175 and D176), academic dishonesty (FH D100), and respectful campus (FH CO9). These are in the *Student Pathfinder* (<https://pathfinder.unm.edu>) and the *Faculty Handbook* (<https://handbook.unm.edu>).

Support: Many students have found that time management workshops or work with peer tutors can help them meet their goals. These and are other resources are available through Student Learning Support at the Center for Teaching and Learning.

Respectful Conduct Expectations: I am committed to building with you a positive classroom environment in which everyone can learn. I reserve the right to intervene and enforce standards of respectful behavior when classroom conduct is inconsistent with University expectations [and/or classroom community agreements]. Interventions and enforcement may include but are not limited to required meetings to discuss classroom expectations, written notification of expectations, and/or removal from a class meeting. Removal from a class meeting will result in an unexcused absence. [Insert number] or more unexcused absences may result in permanent removal and a drop from the course (see attendance policy). UNM ensures freedom of academic inquiry, free expression and open debate, and a respectful campus through adherence to the following policies: [D75: Classroom Conduct](#), [Student Code of Conduct](#), [University Policy 2240 – Respectful Campus](#), [University Policy 2210 – Campus Violence](#)

Connecting to Campus and Finding Support: UNM has many resources and centers to help you thrive, including [opportunities to get involved](#), [mental health resources](#), [academic support such as tutoring](#), [resource centers](#) for people like you, free food at [Lobo Food Pantry](#), and [jobs on campus](#). Your advisor, staff at the [resource centers](#) and [Dean of Students](#), and I can help you find the right opportunities for you.

Copyright Issues

All materials in this course fall under copyright laws and should not be downloaded, distributed, or used by students for any purpose outside this course.

[The UNM Copyright Guide](#) has additional helpful information on this topic.

Course Drop Policy

This course falls under all UNM policies for last day to drop courses, etc. Please see or the UNM Course Catalog for information on UNM services and policies. Please see the UNM academic calendar for course dates, the last day to drop courses without penalty, and for financial disenrollment dates.

Virtual Meeting Recordings

- Technology will be used for virtual meetings in this course and our use of such technology is governed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), the UNM Acceptable Computer Use Policy, UNM Computer Use Guidelines, and UNM's Student Code of Conduct.
- Sharing Electronic video and/or audio recording of the class with participants outside of the class is not permitted without written consent of the instructor and each participating student individually.
- The form to obtain written consent is available at <https://registrar.unm.edu/forms/ferpa-consent.pdf>. If a student in the course is uncomfortable with completing the FERPA consent waiver, then the student should talk with their advisor or instructor to determine whether successful participation in the class is still possible, or whether another course will meet the student's degree requirements.

- If permission for electronic video and/or audio recording is granted, any distribution of the recording is prohibited. You may not share class recordings with anyone outside of this course and doing so may result in disciplinary action.
- Students with specific electronic recording accommodations authorized by the UNM Accessibility Resources Center do not require instructor permission; however, the instructor must be notified of any such accommodation prior to recording.

Readings

- Cooper, Terry L. (2012). *The Responsible Administrator: An Approach to Ethics for the Administrative Role*, 6th Edition, San Francisco: CA, Jossey-Bass
- Bowman, James S. & West, Jonathan P. (2015). *Public Service Ethics: Individual and Institutional Responsibilities*, Thousand Oaks: CA, CQ Press
- William Frankena's *Ethics*: (<http://www.ditext.com/frankena/ethics.html>) to become familiar with some key philosophical concepts
- There are many articles which will be posted on UNM Canvas schedule.

Course Evaluation

Class Participation (15 points): Ethics cannot be learned through lectures. Ethics is based around discussion and personal participation. Students are expected to not only be in class but be part of the class discussion.

Portrayal of Public Service Ethics (20 points): Write a one-to-two-page paper reflecting on how American society portrays the ethicality of public service and public servants. Search at least 2 sources (e.g. newspapers, television, film, music, cartoons, literature, public speeches, etc.) that provide some portrayal of public service ethics. Reflect on the content of these sources and how they reflect the ethicality of public service and public servants. Write about the message they send about public service and public servants. **Due September 17.**

Code of Ethics Paper (15 points): Analyze the American Society of Public Administration (ASPA) Code of Ethics. Assess the utility of these codes and explain why or why not they are useful. Propose improvements to make the codes more effective. Discuss practical applications of these codes of ethics in a workplace context. Explain how you could apply these ethical guidelines in your own workplace. **Due October 15.**

Ethical Cases in Public Administration (30 points):

Ethics cases as a learning tool promote the acquisition of skills like recognizing ethical situations, generating alternatives, and choosing actions to resolve them. The goal of case analysis is to cultivate judgment and encourage practical reasoning. Furthermore, cases encourage learners to interpret facts and make judgments within a socio-political context. Finally, cases train students in perception as well as analysis.

Analyze a real-world ethical dilemma in the field of public administration ethics. Apply ethical decision-making model to the case. Incorporate course readings to propose organizational changes. Write a 8 to 10-page paper of this ethical dilemma. The structure of each paper must include a description of the situation, a statement of the ethical dilemma and a discussion of how the dilemma was resolved. **Due December 10.**

Class Presentation of Ethical Dilemma Analysis in Public Administration (20 points):

Prepare a presentation to communicate your case study. Students must give an overview of the

topic and explain what is the ethical issue involved. Key concepts and theories from class must be incorporated into the presentation.

Grades

- **A grade:** A+ (96–100); A (93–95); A- (90–92)
- **B grade:** B+ (86–89); B (83–85); B- (80–82)
- **C grade:** C+ (76–79); C (73–75); C- (70–72)

Course Outline

Week 1, August 20: Introduction, Syllabus

Week 2, August 27: Ethics Virtue

Readings: William Frankena's *Ethics*: (<http://www.ditext.com/frankena/ethics.html>) to become familiar with some key philosophical concepts. (1) Morality and Moral Philosophy; (2) Egoistic and Deontological Theories; (3) Utilitarianism, Justice, and Love; (4) Moral Value and Responsibility; (5) Intrinsic Value and the Good Life; (6) Meaning and Justification

Week 3, September 3: Ethics in Making of Atomic Bomb: Oppenheimer

Readings: (1) What Scientists Knew and When They Knew It; (2) The Ultimate Bombing; (3) Weapons and Their Consequences; (4) Atomic Bomb

Film: The Day After Trinity

Week 4, September 10: Ethical Decision Making

Readings: (1) Ethical Decision Making (2) Public Administration in Modern and Postmodern Society

Week 5, September 17: Administrative Responsibility

Readings: (1) Administrative Responsibility: The Key to Administrative Ethics

Week 6, September 24: Conflicts of Responsibility

Readings: (1) Conflicts of Responsibility: The Ethical Dilemma

Week 7, October 1: Ethics in Organizations

Readings: Maintaining Responsible Conduct in Public Organizations: Two Approaches; (2) Integrating Ethics with Organizational Norms and Structure; (3) Safeguarding Ethical Autonomy in Organizations: Dealing with Unethical Superiors and Organizations

Week 8, October 8: Fall Break, no class

Week 9, October 15: Whistle Blowing & Leaks

Readings: (1) Safeguarding Ethical Autonomy in Organizations; (2) Whistle Blowing in the Public Sector; (3) Whistle Blowing in the Public Sector

Week 10, October 22: The Design Approach

Readings: (1) Applying the Design Approach in Public Administration Ethics; (2) Responsible Administration; (3) Research on Ethics and Integrity in Public Administration; (4) Ethics of Robotized Public Service

Week 11, October 29: Ethical Dilemma Cases

Readings: to come

Week 12, November 5: Ethical Dilemma Cases

Readings: to come

Week 13, November 12: Ethical Dilemma Cases

Readings: to come

Week 14, November 19: Ethical Dilemma Cases

Readings: to come

Week 15, November 26: (Thanksgiving)

Week 16, December 3: Overview