

## **CSUSB MPA Program 2019-2020 Comprehensive Exam Questions**

The MPA Comprehensive Exam consists of two parts; a core course section and an integrative section.. You will answer two course based questions. You will also answer one assigned integrative question- (a total of 3 questions). The question pool is listed below. There are four possible questions for each core course. Dr. Anderson will select one question for each core course for each quarter's exam. On the day of the exam students will answer two of those course based questions from the exam day list.

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.

Contact Graduate Director Dr. Jonathan Anderson, with any questions about the process.

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### **PA 603 Research Methods in Administration**

1. Imagine you are the Planning Director for the City of X, which is experiencing cash flow problems. The City has been approached by a developer to purchase an underutilized and somewhat rundown two and a half acre neighborhood park, and convert it into mausoleum, which will house ashes of the deceased in eight-inch square boxes in tombs below ground which will then be covered by artificial turf, beautiful landscaping and a water feature.

This will free up cash to build bleachers at the City owned youth soccer fields. The park is surrounded on three sides by single-family homes and the fourth by an elementary school. There has been some opposition from the local neighborhood association, but word has it that the opposition is not so much about the loss of the park but its new use. You are asked to research the opinion of property owners within a one thousand foot radius of the proposed site.

What research instruments and methodology will you use? Will your research qualitative, quantitative, or both? How will you ensure both internal and external validity and guard against bias?

2. Imagine that you are a Human Resource Analyst at the County of San Bernardino. Your employer has informed you that the county is experiencing higher than normal employee attrition rates in the Public Works, Human Services, and Behavioral Health departments. You are tasked to find out:

- a) Why are employees leaving? AND
- b) What can we do to retain a higher percentage of employees?

Construct your research questions.

Determine and justify a methodology.

Identify dependent and independent variables.

Identify the unit of analysis

Identify the unit of observation

Select data collection methods and explain why these methods are appropriate.

What sampling technique(s) will you use and why is it appropriate for this study?

3. To save money, some on your city council have proposed to shut down a number of libraries. They cite lack of impact on core city objectives and the obsolescence of books in a digital age. You are tasked with devising a research project to measure the impact of libraries in the community. Design a research proposal to be presented to city council. Take care to make it objective. Include your proposed research methods.

4. Suppose you want to study the relationship between public service motivation (PSM) and employee performance. Describe (in some detail) how you would design a research project following the traditional model of research.

### **PA 611 Public Administration Theory and Practice**

1. Describe the role of ethics in public administration and how the concept has evolved over the past thirty years. What influences have shaped this evolution and guided development of ethical standards or laws? Do you believe they have improved conduct in the public arena? Explain.

2. What is public administration theory? Make sure to reference at least one theory that originated in public administration literature. Is theory necessary for public administration? Discuss the nature of public administration theories, their scope/uses, their contribution to practice and their weaknesses.

3. Public Administration in the United States is based on a Constitutional structure. In an essay discussing the role of the public manager in a democracy outline:

- a. The basic constitutional framework of the United States
- b. The definition of democracy and the challenge of achieving it in the United States.
- c. The role of public managers in governing the United States at its various levels.
- d. The role of citizens in governance, and how public managers should engage them.

4. How are public sector employees motivated? Discuss how employees in the public and private sectors are, or are not, motivated differently. What are the opportunities and challenges for a public sector supervisor?

### **PA 615 Public Financial Management**

1. While the economy has continued to improve since the Great Recession of 2007-08, the issue of sustainability remains critically important for local governments. Discuss what the term fiscal stress means as it applies to local government. Identify three (3) adverse conditions likely to occur to a city or county that is fiscally stressed and how they may be problematic. Discuss three (3) financial management strategies that can help prevent local governments from becoming fiscally stressed.

2. Local governments provide periodic reports known as Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports (CAFR). Discuss the composition of such reports – specifically focus on the type of data they provide and the reporting standards that they follow. What are their main scopes and strategic goals? Identify the audiences and stakeholders, and why and how they use reports. Finally, discuss (evaluate) the weaknesses and strengths of CAFRs.

3. Define and discuss the concept of “fiscal illusion”. In your answer address the following sub-questions: (1) What is fiscal illusion? (2) Why do local governments engage in fiscal illusion? (3) What are the overall and specifically ethical implications/consequences of such practices? In your concluding remarks estimate of whether the use of such practices will increase or decrease in the future. Make sure to provide details about the rationale behind your choice.

4. The financial performance and fiscal condition of local governments typically can be divided into two large categories – objective and subjective measures. Define and discuss two objective and two subjective measures of municipal fiscal conditions. For each measure make sure to address: (1) why the measure is used (its appeal), (2) the audiences/stakeholders for the measure, (3) strengths, and (4) weaknesses of the measures. In your concluding remarks estimate whether these subjective or objective measures of fiscal condition will increase or decrease in the near future. Provide details of the rationale behind your choice.

#### **PA 650 Public Sector MIS**

1. A key factor in the development of an Enterprise Architecture (EA) for a government agency is whether the IT system should be centralized or decentralized. This fundamental issue has huge ramifications for the future management and performance of the organization, and the nature of the workforce. Although you are not the CIO, you occupy a senior leadership position and you have a major role in the decision. As such, you are expected to vote on the IT configuration of the agency at the next meeting. What criteria will you base your decision on and how is it reflected in the resulting Enterprise Architecture?

2. How has technology changed the nature of group work and collaboration? Describe at least THREE TYPES of technical collaboration tools, how they are used, and how they will change traditional agency work.

3. Describe a mature mobile computing environment, its core components and key attributes. What impact do you expect mobile computing to have on CSUSB, its students, faculty, and management and administration over the next 5 years?

4. Everyone agrees these days that real collaboration is the key to a successful IT environment in a government agency. Yet, assessments of agency IT problems often highlight the need for collaboration, causing many to wonder why this relatively simple and extremely valuable attribute is so difficult. Why do you think IT collaboration continues to be an elusive ideal? In your answer, be sure do define what you mean by collaboration, how it is operationalized in the agency IT environment and why it is so important. Specifically, discuss the collaboration issues that arise among programs, between agencies, and among the technical and non-technical workforce in a single agency.

## **PA 662 Human Resource Management in the Public Sector**

1. Conflict in organizations is inevitable and must be managed. Identify varieties of conflict that arise in organizations. Explain how conflict can be both positive and negative. Gender based conflict has been in the news a great deal over the past few years. Outline the issues and suggest how organizations can address gender-based conflict. Finally, identify the steps you would follow if a sexual harassment complaint was brought to your attention.

2. You have a newly approved professional position in your public agency that will trigger an open search. It is a desirable position and will likely have many qualified applicants. Your department employs several people at a lower grade who are likely to apply who may or may not meet the technical qualifications and, may or may not be the best fit for your department. Because of the popularity of these employees, you are concerned that the process not turn into a sham recruitment. Explain what you would do to ensure that the best candidate is hired (inside or out), and not simply the candidate who is best connected? Review recruitment, selection, and management issues you address to ensure the fairness and legality of the hiring process.

3. Briefly describe (1) the elements of an ideal, yet pragmatic appraisal system for professional employees. Then address the following issues. (2) How does the system help enhance intrinsic motivation, while simultaneously assuring some degree of extrinsic motivation? (3) What are three common problems of appraisal systems related to professional employees and how do you deal with them?

4. In an essay;

a) Describe the classic grades-and-steps position management system that traditionally emphasized seniority.

(b) Describe the more recently promoted grade, range, position management system that is supposed to emphasize performance based on merit.

(c) Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each type of system.

## **PA 663 Public Budgeting and Finance**

1. Since 1978, Proposition 13 has had a profound effect on the economy of California. Discuss the impact Proposition 13 has had on local governments and the residents of California. Because of the legislation, many cities developed "reactionary policies." Identify 3 reactionary policies used by local governments as a result of "Prop 13."

2. Discuss the various approaches state and local governments may utilize to generate revenue. What are the economic and social factors that influence revenue generation ideas? Discuss and evaluate two budgetary theories related to revenue generation.

3. Over the past two decades, local governments have become increasingly more reliant on the use of service charges and fees. Explain why there has been a shift to rely on service charges and fees to generate revenue for local governments. As you explain this revenue policy, discuss their benefits and

challenges/barriers (including equity) while providing three examples of each (3 examples of benefits; 3 examples of challenges/barriers).

4. Public budgeting is challenging because government typically deals with the issue of scarce resources. Discuss the issues of resource allocation that elected officials and public managers face in relation to the question V. O. Key posed nearly 80 years: "On what basis shall it be decided to allocate x dollars to activity A instead of activity B?" How can elected officials and public managers address this inherent challenge today?

### **PA 664 Management of Public Organizations**

1. Discuss how organizational behavior is defined in the public sector. Does it differ from organizational behavior outside of the public sector? Why or why not? How might intrinsic and extrinsic motivations be different in the public sector vis-à-vis other sectors?

2. Compare and contrast different styles of leadership. Propose scenarios where each style might be most appropriate.

3. Identify and explain the various ways in which leaders establish their credibility through their actions and how that contributes to leader performance.

4. Identify at least four market mechanisms used by some governments. What are the advantages and disadvantages, empirical and normative, of using market mechanisms?

### **PA 672 Administrative Regulation**

1. Discuss how the Commerce Clause was used to expand the role and reach of the federal government.

2. Discuss how the Fourteenth Amendment, largely ignored after the end of Reconstruction, had such an effect on government policies starting in the 1950s and 1960s.

(a) What does the 14th Amendment do or what protections does it provide when implemented?

(b) What policy areas does it affect most substantially?

(c) What is beyond the reach of the 14th Amendment? (the 14th Amendment purposely does not cover many policy areas);

Provide examples of where it does not apply.

3. Distinguish and compare absolute and qualified immunity and to whom it applies. Provide several examples where public servants are covered by these two types of immunity, and situations in which it does not apply or is lost by public servants.

4. Discuss the generic appeals process of administrative decisions, starting at the agency level and proceeding to judicial review. Provide one concrete example in which a decision was appealed first at the agency level, then in district and appeals levels, and finally at the Supreme Court.

## PA 680 Public Policy Analysis

1. Define, explain, and contrast the politics of interest and the politics of conscience and how they influence policy making in the United States, including their relationship to public service values. Be sure to include examples in your response and discuss the difficulty in identification and application of these influences within and between political parties.
2. Discuss the balancing act for the public policy analyst between rationality and politics. How is this inherent conflict managed in the U.S. governance system? Within your answer be sure to define all terminology used and provide real world examples to make your case.
3. How are problems in society addressed through public policy? How do they get on the policy agenda? Discuss the primary stakeholders and their interest in the process. Provide real life case examples as part of your answer.
4. What are some positive and negative factors of the incremental nature of U.S. policy making? Provide one policy example of how it has been beneficial and one policy example of how it has been detrimental to the U.S. process.

## Integrative Questions

### **1. Competency: to lead and manage in public governance.**

You are the Chief Executive Officer of a California County (you select which one). You are aware of the critical need to manage water resources in the public interest. After briefing your Supervisors, they task you with leading an effort to coordinate a new water management policy for the County.

How will you go about this task?

Who are the stakeholders and what are their needs?

What resources will be needed?

How do leadership theories help guide your effort?

Note: this is NOT about the content of water policy. It is about planning a process.

### **2. Competency: to participate in and contribute to the public policy process**

You are a legislative assistant to the Chief Administrator for a California County (you select which one).

The CAO was tasked by the Board of Supervisors to initiate a new Water Management Policy for the County. The CAO has tasked you to write the initial brief for the process. In that brief, you need to a)

identify the policy issues;

b) identify the stakeholders- both public and private and what their concerns are;

- c) articulate the policy process and how you will seek to manage it
- d) Suggest what the biggest problem is and how you recommend addressing it.

**3. Competency: to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions**

You are the Chief Financial Management Officer of a California county (you select which one). The CAO has tasked you with proposing a funding plan for a proposed Water Management Policy that will require an initial outlay of \$20 million dollars and subsequent annual outlays of \$5 million for the foreseeable future. How will you approach this task? What information do you need to know? What possible alternatives are there? What are their pros and cons? Make a recommendation supported by evidence and reasoning.

**4. Competency: to articulate and apply a public service perspective.**

A Water Management Plan has been created for your County in collaboration with other stakeholders. Now it must be implemented. Some County Supervisors recommend outsourcing the policy implementation. You are tasked with briefing the Board on the pros and cons of such outsourcing. Begin your brief by outlining the issues of any outsourcing of the public's business, making sure to identify any ethical or public service values that are important to understand about this issue. Make a recommendation supported by evidence and reasoning.

**5. Competency: to communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry**

Your County is leading an intergovernmental Regional Water Policy. Your region contains both urban and rural areas, including agricultural. It also includes several Indian reservations. You need to propose a communication plan to inform, educate and raise support for the policy throughout the region. How will you go about this task? You have a six-member team to assist you. Present your work plan.