Where the Citizen Meets the State: An Administrative Burden Perspective

Where: University of Bern, UniS, Schanzeneckstrasse 1, 3001 Bern

Donald Moynihan, Georgetown University and University of Oxford,
Donald.moynihan@georgetown.edu

The idea of administrative burden is intuitive. We recognize it from our experience as citizens engaging with the state. It reflects the time we spend getting a new driver’s license, or the lines when we vote. For many, it also reflects the difficulties in accessing public services such as income supports. All policies that require citizens to engage with the state will, to varying degrees, create venues where the state may burden citizens.

This class explores administrative burdens as a new theoretical framework to understand citizen-state interactions. This framework has emerged over the last decade by drawing insights from public administration, political sociology, psychology and behavioral economics. The conceptual framework is built on three types of costs. Learning costs arise from engaging in search processes to collect information: Are there services that can fulfill unmet needs? Would one qualify for them? What are the requirements for the application process? Compliance costs are the material burdens of following administrative rules and requirements. This is the time lost waiting in line, completing forms or providing documentation of status. It is the money spent on hiring an accountant to do your taxes, or the fees immigrants pay to process paperwork. Psychological costs include the stigma of applying for or participating in a program that carries negative associations, a sense of loss of personal power or autonomy in interactions with the state, or the stresses and frustrations of dealing with administrative processes. The framework also identifies the role that non-state actors can play in buffering or amplifying the effects of burdens.

Burdens affect whether people will be able to exercise fundamental rights of citizenship, like voting, or can access benefits that can improve quality of life, like health insurance. Burdens can alter the effectiveness of public programs. Social programs often reach only a fraction of their target population, automatically weakening their effectiveness by shutting out those who fail to negotiate the required procedure. These basic facts place burdens at the center of big questions about the administrative state: Are people able to enjoy in practice the rights and benefits provided to them in theory? Are public policies working? How does the state facilitate or minimize inequality? How can we design citizen-state interactions to better achieve shared normative goals?
Topic Overview (subject to revision depending on the number of students):

Day 1: Introduction to the Concept of Administrative Burdens
9.30-12.30 – The concept of administrative burden; lecture and discussion (with break)
12.30-13.30 – Lunch break
13.30-14.15 – Red tape, workload and occupational stress in the Dutch civil service, presentation by Bram Steijn and Brenda Vermeeren
14.30 – 16.00 – Group discussion
Pick a policy area in a country you are familiar with and describe citizen state interactions in that policy area.
* What are potential learning, compliance and psychological costs in these interactions?
* What evidence can you point to about the nature and effects of these costs?
* Do administrative burdens have distributive effects that foster inequality?
* Why do the costs exist?
* Is it appropriate to try to minimize administrative burdens in this area? If so, how?

Day 2: Researching Administrative Burdens
9.30-11.00 – Overview of causal hypotheses, research techniques and examples for studying the topic
11.15-12.30 – Group discussion
Map out a research project to study the administrative burdens identified in your first essay.
* What are the critical research questions?
* What theoretical perspectives would inform your work?
* What sort of data would you use? How would you collect this?
* Can you outline a causal theory of the factors that shape your dependent variable?
12.30-13.30 – Lunch break
13.30-15.00 –Optional panel on publishing your research

Readings:


**Student Responsibilities:**

*Credits and Grading*
If you have signed up for the course for credit: 2 ECTS, PhD-students need to announce when applying for the course if they want to have their contributions (paper 1 & 2, participation & presentation in the course) graded. Each student will be asked to make at least one presentation (15 minutes approximately) based on one of the short papers they write.

*Participation*
Students are expected to actively engage in analytical discussion throughout.

Submit written work a week before the class begins to Donald.moynihan@georgetown.edu. I will post all papers on a shared dropbox folder.

More information and application for the course: adrian.ritz@kpm.unibe.ch

**About the Lecturer:**

Donald Moynihan is the inaugural McCourt Chair at the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University. He is currently a Visiting Professor at the Blavatnik School from 2018-2021 and an academic visitor at Nuffield College at Oxford University. His research examines public sector performance, employee behavior, and the administrative burdens citizens encounter in their interactions with government. Moynihan has presented his research on public sector performance to policymakers at the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

He is the author, most recently, of Administrative Burdens: Policymaking by Other Means with the Russell Sage Foundation. His book, The Dynamics of Performance Management: Constructing Information and Reform, was named best book by the Academy of Management's Public and Nonprofit Division and received the Herbert Simon award from the American Political Science Association, which honors the book with the most significant influence in public administration scholarship in the last three to five years. He created the Performance Information Project, which tracks research on performance management. Moynihan also is the co-author of “Toward Next-Generation Performance Budgeting,” published by the World Bank. Moynihan’s work has appeared in Nature, the American Journal...
of Political Science, The Journal of Politics, Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, and numerous other scholarly journals. In 2014, Moynihan was awarded the Kershaw Award, which is provided every two years by Mathematica and the Association of Public Policy and Management to one scholar under the age of 40 for outstanding contributions to the study of public policy and management. Journal articles Moynihan has authored have won awards from the Public and Nonprofit Division of the Academy of Management (2002, 2017), the American Review of Public Administration (2003), Public Administration Review (2007), and Public Administration (2013). Public Administration Review also selected two of his articles on leadership and motivation among the 75 most influential papers in its 75-year history. On three occasions, Moynihan has won the American Society for Public Administration Wholey Award for outstanding scholarship on performance in public and nonprofit organizations (2009, 2011, and 2013). He won the 2011 National Academy of Public Administration/Wilder School award for scholarship in social equity. Moynihan received the 2012 Distinguished Research Award from ASPA and the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration. Moynihan is former co-editor of Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory and Public Administration Review. He is past-President of the Public Management Research Association. In 2011, he was elected to the National Academy of Public Administration.

A native of Ireland, Moynihan completed his Bachelor of Arts degree in public administration at the University of Limerick, and his master’s and Ph.D. in public administration from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University. Professor Moynihan previously served as the Director of the La Follette School of Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and is also a Visiting Professor at Oxford University.