

Local Government Finance – Syllabus

Spring Quarter 2014 – 2 Credits

Schedule (Weekend Intensive):

Friday, April 25th, 6:00 to 10:00 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday April 26th and 27th; 9a.m. to 5 p.m.

Class location: Seminar 2 Complex, Building C, Room 2109

Primary Catalog Listing: Graduate Studies.

Cross Listing: Public Administration, Political Science.

Prerequisites: Good standing as an MPA student.

Instructor: Stephen Buxbaum, email: buxbaums@evergreen.edu

Course Description:

This course provides students with a basic understanding of the sources and uses of revenues that are available to local governments to support public programs, services and projects. Emphasis will be placed on learning about the politics of the budgetary process as well as understanding the fundamentals of the statutory framework that cities, counties and special purpose districts must work within as they strive to sustain their core services. Special focus will be given to how cities, counties and school districts develop and manage their budgets. The course is intended for MPA or MES students.

Learning Objectives:

- Gain practical knowledge about what revenue sources are available to Washington State's local governments.
- Investigate the way local governments use revenues to fund and finance programs, projects and services.
- Gain a practical basic understanding of how operating and capital budgets are formulated.
- Consider how Washington State's laws enable, limit and in some cases prohibit the use of taxes, fees and bonds.
- Examine how state and local government finance systems influences the delivery of services and investment of public and private capital.
- Investigate the politics of the budgetary process.
- Consider how viable the state's current systems of local government resource allocation are.
- Gain practical knowledge about the financial and budget practices of Washington's county, city and special purpose district governments.
- Learn how to access and use information from public access web sites about local government budgets, financial forecasting and resource management.

Methods and Assignments:

- Collaborate to stay focused upon the course's ambitious learning objectives.
- Form a supportive "learning community" wherein class participants can be inquisitive, explore and share information about the course material and exercises.
- Use "system thinking" exercises to learn about what influences how organizations and governments work.
- Provide written answers to questions provided in class on worksheets and during class room exercises.
- Draw from the experience of practitioners.
- Make use of internet source material to learn about, understand and research local government budgetary processes.

A local jurisdiction's budget is probably its single most important policy document. Annual operating budgets and multi-year capital budgets prescribe what specific things a government intends to do. We will draw from readings, case studies and internet resources as we work together to learn about and examine how local governments in Washington State develop their budgets. Class sessions will be interactive, combining presentations by the instructor and guests with seminar style discussions. *Please check your schedule and your calendar to be certain you can participate fully at every class.* There is no option for partial credit or an incomplete. Students will provide a short paragraph addressing their background and interests relative to the course material to be shared during the first class and emailed to Stephen no later than COB Tuesday, April 15, 2014. Students will complete seminar worksheets in class and participate in small and large group "system thinking" exercises.

Please note: Students are required to use Moodle and email for assignments and distribution of class reading materials. Reading material for this class will be provided electronically via Moodle. Some assignments will involve accessing public web sites. None of the readings need to be purchased – they can be printed from Moodle at the students own expense. The class Moodle site will go "live" on Sunday, March 30, 2014.

Primary Reading Materials:

Selected readings from: *The Closest Governments to the People, A Complete Reference Guide to Local Government in Washington State*, by Steve Lundin. (By special arrangement with the author and publisher selected chapters will be available to students via our class Moodle site. There is no need to purchase this text.) The class will use resources and documents from the web sites of the following organizations:

- The Washington State Municipal Research Service Center (MRSC)
- The Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM)
- The Association of Washington Cities (AWC)
- The Washington State Association Counties (WSAC)
- The Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction
- And other state, federal and local internet sites.

Local Government Finance Credit Requirements (2 credits)

For credit in this class, students are required to:

1. Complete all the assigned readings.
2. Attend all classes, starting the evening of April 25th through the end of the day Sunday, April 27th.
3. Actively participate in class discussions, exercises and triad/seminar team work.
4. Complete all written assignments – including worksheets to be completed during classroom exercises and seminars. Evaluation sheets will be provided to students and are to be completed and turned in at the end of each class.
5. Consistent with MPA program requirements, students will prepare a self-evaluation and an evaluation of the instructor. Students should include in their self evaluation at least one important lesson or idea that has influenced their thinking relative to the course's learning objectives. Student/faculty evaluations can be completed in person, over the phone or via email exchange as per a mutually agreed upon approach in keeping with the college's established evaluation deadlines. It's the responsibility of the student to schedule and come to agreement with the instructor regarding the method for conducting the evaluation by end of class on April 27, 2014.

MPA Standards of Conduct: *Having respect for others is fundamental to an open, free, and educational dialogue. All students are expected to support and contribute to a well functioning MPA classroom learning community. Behavior that disrupts the learning community may be grounds for disciplinary action, including dismissal from the MPA program. All students will be held accountable for maintaining the highest of academic standards – plagiarism will result in a full loss of credit for the class.*

About the Instructor:

Stephen Buxbaum has more than thirty years of management experience in the non-profit and public sectors focusing on community and economic development programs and policy. His background includes extensive work on farmland preservation, sustainable agriculture and water conservation beginning in the 1970's and '80's. He has worked at local, state and federal levels of government both in Washington State and Washington, D.C. He believes deeply in experiential learning and multi-disciplinary education and has been an active sponsor of Evergreen State College interns in his work in the Pacific Northwest. As an executive manager for the state of Washington, he oversaw financing of hundreds of affordable housing, community facilities and public works projects. During his career he has managed some of Washington State's most successful grant and loan programs, including the Housing Trust Fund and the Community Development Block Grant program. In 2005, he received a fellowship to attend Harvard University's program for senior executives in state and local government. In 2006, he was appointed to chair the Governor's Interagency Council on Homelessness. Now, in addition to managing his consulting business, he teaches part-time for Evergreen's Masters of Public Administration program. In November 2009 he was elected to serve on Olympia, Washington's City Council. He was elected by his peers to serve as Olympia's Mayor Pro Tem (Deputy Mayor) from April 2010 to December 2011. He was elected Mayor of Olympia in the 2011 General Election and assumed office on January 3, 2012 (term ending December 31, 2015).