Bridging the gap between theory and practice is a, if not the, fundamental question facing academicians and professional administrators concerned with advancing the field of public administration. One increasing popular tool utilized by both the practicing administrator and the academic scholar in public administration is the case study. Case study research is categorized into two separate fields of inquiry and knowledge development. They are the research case study and the role simulation case study. The investigative focused case study is concerned with discovering and explaining ground breaking research that is emerging in public administration, while the role simulation case study exposes the public administrative student to real life examples and dilemmas that practicing administrators face on a routine basis. The following book reviews analyze three current texts that are concerned with both types of case study research for public administration.


Professor Banovetz’s book “Managing Local Government Finance: Case Studies In Decision Making” is a fairly recent publication concerned with role simulation case studies. The book explores current issues that specifically deal with finance and budgeting dilemmas facing local governments. Through a series of six distinct cases Banovetz addresses a number of relevant issues to the current practice of public
administration such as taxation, economic development, budget implementation, debt management, and budget preparation. As the editor of this text, Banovetz has carefully selected the contributors to this book from a distinct list of professionals in the field of public administration. For example, the contributors have practical experience as town and city managers, finance directors, and several currently hold academic positions at prestigious universities in America.

Although the text is primarily focused on local government management and the dilemmas created by financial restraints, the menagerie of topics discussed in these six chapters demonstrate first had the spillover effects and externalities associated with managing in the public sector. For instance, in reference to local government impacts, two cases deal with county level governance, two with small cities, two with medium cities and one with large city administration. The context of government issues found in the chapters include, but are not limited to, politics, administration and politics, public policymaking, and government’s role in the economy.

In addition to the implications of these case studies on various levels of governance are the issues associated with public budgeting and finance. Some of these issues found in the text include, four dealing with tax policy, five cases dealing with public revenues and economic forecasting, three cases focused on economic development, three cases are concerned with cost/benefit analysis, two cases are concerned with budget formulation, two with program evaluation, two with capital budgeting, and at least one of the cases deal with budget implementation, debt management, and capital finance.
One unique feature presented by this case study text is its unique emphasis on local government administration. Banovetz’s points out that unlike federal and state government administration, local government leaders are making decisions “with the people” and not “away from the people” (p. VI). Banovetz’s correctly posits that to the people, state and federal public administrators are merely “television images and distinct names placed “away in the capital (p. VI). By making this suggestion, Banovetz concludes by stating that local government administration is practiced by your “neighbor, church associate, or someone you know in the community” (p. VII). One prominent theme present in all six of the case studies is the importance local government politics in budgeting and financial management dilemmas. This undeniable political reality of each case study establishes the credence in this text for training the modern public administrator.

Banovetz provides the instructor with a supplemental text that discusses the real life situation and results from the administrative decisions made in each case. This allows the instructor to compare student analyses of each case with the actual case itself. Each case challenges the reader by placing them in the context of a real world situation facing public administration and asked the reader what would they do to solve the problem at hand. The book receives great reviews from students about its applied nature and application and the critical thinking fostered each case study found in the text. Hence, for the practicing public administrator or the academic scholar wanting to expose students to the applied side of public administration “Managing Local Government Finance: Case Studies In Decision Making” is highly recommended. This positive
recommendation is premised on the reviewer’s analysis of the text, as well as positive feedback from students utilizing this text in an accredited MPA program.


Robert Watson incorporates a multitude of diverse scholars with in the fields of public policy, public administration, political science, public finance, health care, criminal justice, sociology and a host of other disciplines in an effort to provide students with the opportunity to “walk in the shoes of public administrators” (p. IX). Watson adds a dimension to this text that is new to books concerned with practical applications of public administration: nonprofit administration. The author fails to see a dichotomy between the dilemmas of public administration and nonprofit management, allowing this text to address an emerging concern in the case study literature. In addition to this distinct characteristic, the cases chosen by Watson for this text involve interrelated political uncertainty, ethical dilemmas, along with legal and administrative core factors currently facing the field of public administration. The core factors pertinent to this text include cases that deal with current trends in human resources management, public budgeting and finance, organizational behavior and public sector management, and program planning and evaluation. The overriding purpose of this text, according to Watson, is to encourage students to analyze the sources of the problems facing modern public administration, offer possible courses of action in solving each case study, while simultaneously exposing each students to the possible consequences of their decisions.

By providing the reader with a brief history of the development of public administration, this book will serve well as a supplemental text for any introductory
course in public administration. Secondly, due to the multitude of diverse cases dealing with the core issues of public administration that were previously discussed, the instructor can surely find one case that pertains to each chapter in an introductory text to public administration. Additionally, for MPA programs that have incorporated a capstone course as a requirement for graduation, this text will serve the needs of the instructor wanting to test the student’s ability to apply theory with practice in public administration. Assuming that the capstone course is the remaining required course for the MPA student, the general nature of the book’s structure lends itself well for this academic endeavor. Again, by the numerous administrative concerns of this text in the areas of budgeting, public management, policy and program analysis, politics and administration, the instructor can test the students ability to use critical thinking in solving real world administrative dilemmas.

Another important contribution of the text is the emphasis placed on the distinction of public management versus private management. Before the analysis of any case study begins the reader is quickly reminded, or informed of the differences between managing in the public sector versus the private sector. This concept is important for the reader because those students with a limited background in public administration are warned that many private sector management techniques are inappropriate for public management. Since many MPA programs in America are training more and more students with business backgrounds, this aspect of the book serves as a wonderful reminder that public management and private management are unalike in many important ways!
The concluding section of each case provides the reader and instructor with a role playing assignment for bridging that important gap of theory and administration. The student is simply asked to place them self in the role of the primary administrator in each case, and then solve the dilemma at hand. This fosters critical thinking on the part of the individual for applying the theoretical aspects of public administration to the practice at hand. For group participation, a series of discussion questions are provided so the instructor can stimulate conversation in a class setting about each case.

On page three of the text, a Sample Case Analysis Brief is offered as an outline for the student to utilize in the evaluation of each case. Since most pre-service and in-service MPA students have experienced little case study training before they enter a public administration program, these analyses guidelines serve as popular tools for directing the student in the correct path of case study evaluation. The steps outlined in this analysis guide are as follows; 1) Facts; 2) Issues; 3) Actors; 4) Analysis; 5) Group Analysis; 6) Courses of Action; 7) Decision. This seven-step process of case analysis prepares the student with a formal, yet general approach to case study analyses that will assist them throughout their MPA experience.

“Public Administration: Cases In Managerial Role Playing” is an excellent text and is highly recommended for anyone wanting to bring the practical applications of public administration to the classroom. This text is well written and pulls knowledge from many of the leading practitioners and scholars in the field of public administration. Not only is this text recommended for the class from an analysis point of view, but from a practical as well. This text is used in our introductory class in public administration and
students comment positively on the practical applications and the challenging critical thinking fostered by this book.


“Case Studies In Public Budgeting and Financial Management” is one of the most comprehensive case study books, dealing with current public budgeting and financial management issues in print today. In its second addition, this 800 page text covers an enormous selection of the most current case study research dealing with the practice of public budgeting and finance. The case study research found in this text is different that the previously discussed books. Role simulation is not the focus of “Case Studies In Public Budgeting and Financial Management,” but scholarly evaluation of many of the current budgeting and financial management practices found in public sector agencies across America. The content of case studies in this text are provided by a motley number of academic scholars and administrative practitioners in America. By drawing on such a diverse selection of professionals in the discipline of public administration this text covers most of the prominent issues in public budgeting today. The organization of the text is simple and easily understood allowing the instructor to assign chapters of the book with any leading introductory text in public budgeting and financial management.

The book is divided into two separate and distinct parts. The first section of the text deals with issues associated with public budgeting and the second part of the text is predominantly concerned with issues of financial management. Each section in the text is comprised of groups that deal with a particular topic in each general category. For instance, group A, in part one of the text, addresses the concerns associated with the
political economy of budgeting. Heavy in the context of local government budgeting, the contributors focus in this section primarily with the differences between services offered by older cities compared to newer cities to disputes over the distribution of resources such as a local option sales tax.

One especially interesting case found in Group A, “The Political Economy of Outsourcing,” explores the decision to outsource government services by contracting out and privatization. The case points out that various indicators are present when these issues are brought before governmental entities: political, strategic, operational and financial. Depending on the context in which these issues arise will determine which indicators dominate the process of privatization or contracting out of government services. The interesting aspect of this case is the whole host of issues that emerge in the wake of budgetary dilemmas.

The next four cases deal with the following issues in public budgeting: budget execution, budget management systems, budget analysis, and capital budgeting. These issues are loosely grouped into a category known as “budget management practices (p. 77). With a shift to federal budgeting the next case deals with the procedures of budget execution. This group of case studies is important for distinguishing the similarities and differences found across the three levels of governmental budgeting practices.

Prominent budgeting management systems then become the focal point of the next set of case studies in the text. Such issues as program budgeting, as for the case in Mississippi, to performance budgeting, zero-based budgeting, target based budgeting and strategic budgeting are given considerable recognition in this series of case studies. This set of case studies work well with lectures on the history of budgetary reform in public
administration because as the instructor deals with each type of budgetary reform (e.g., program budgeting), case studies from this text can serve as examples for each budgetary model.

In chapters 16 – 18, three leading issues in capital budgeting receive attention. They are practices in capital budgeting, capital programming and capital financing. The concluding chapters in Part I of the text focus on budget practices in times of fiscal stress. With the budgetary crises being experienced by almost all governmental entities and agencies, the timing and relevance of this section could not be any more appropriate. The issues that emerge from these case studies are concerned with operating budgets in times of uncertainty, financial mismanagement, poor administrative control, political brinkmanship, consolidation of government services, downsizing and cutback management.

Part II of the text shifts to focus on issues related to financial management. Some of the more prominent concerns of these case studies include financial reporting, changes in reporting procedures, new auditing techniques, benchmarking and cost accounting. One interesting case study in this section, “Benchmarking and Cost Accounting: The North Carolina Approach,” emphasizes benchmarking as a management tool to promote process improvement in government agencies. The study is quick to note that that one primary weakness of benchmarking is the lack of generally accepted criteria by which service costs can be compared.

The majority of the remaining chapters deal with spending and tax policies for governments and public agencies, as well as the degree of comparability in their resource, cash and debt management policies. With the emergence of voter outrage and unrest
with governmental waste and corruption, one prominent theme recognized by these case studies is accountability. The scholars recognize that mechanism for increased accountability are warranted by this voter unrest and they’re research is offering explanations and possible ideas on how to improve this ever increasing administrative value.

Although a bit lengthy, this text is highly recommended to the scholar interested in bringing practical applications of budgetary techniques to the classroom. This text is highly recommended for use in any public budgeting or financial management class due to the enormous amount of knowledge and experience found in the contributors to this text. Khan and Hildreth draw on many of the leading budgetary scholars in this valuable text in public budgeting. Accompanying any introductory text on public budgeting, or serving as a primary text for classes in applied budgeting, this text will serve both the instructors need for practical applications of budgetary theory, while informing the student with ground breaking research in this sub-field of public administration.

Conclusion

The three texts analyzed in this book review offer recommendations to scholars and practitioners about the relevance of case study research for advancing the knowledge and practicality of public administration. Again, the approach of Khan and Hildreth’s text is unveiling current trends of case study research by presenting the findings of prominent scholars in this sub-field of public administration, while the Banovetz and Watson texts explore the use of role simulation in case study research. Although the three texts approach case study research from different angles, the end result is the same.
All three texts are highly recommended for bridging the gap between theory and practice in public administration.