RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
School of Public Affairs and Administration

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AI for Government and Nonprofits
(20:834:502) [3 credits]

Course Description
How should governments and nonprofit organizations lead in an AI-driven world? This course examines artificial intelligence (AI) as a governance force, rather than simply a technical tool, in public and nonprofit organizations. Students explore how intelligent systems reshape decision-making authority, discretion, accountability, and public trust as they become embedded in organizational practice and public service delivery. The course develops AI literacy alongside institutional, ethical, and leadership perspectives, emphasizing how design choices, data, and organizational arrangements shape control over AI systems. Through applied learning and critical analysis, students build the judgment needed to evaluate AI systems and design context-sensitive governance approaches that balance innovation, risk, and public value.

Learning Objectives
By the end of this course, students will be able to:
- **Explain how AI functions as a governance actor** by describing how intelligent systems shift decision-making authority, discretion, and accountability in government and nonprofits.
- **Demonstrate applied AI literacy** by explaining how AI systems work in practice, including the roles of data, machine learning, large language models, prompts, and user interfaces.
- **Analyze the limits and failures of AI systems**, such as hallucinations and automation bias, and explain why these issues create governance risks rather than only technical problems.
- **Evaluate organizational and institutional choices**, including readiness, human-in-the-loop design, procurement, and vendor relationships, that determine who controls AI systems in real-world practice.
- **Design responsible AI governance approaches** that address ethical risks, transparency, accountability, and public trust in public and nonprofit settings.

Requirements
Requirements will vary by instructor and may include:
- **Class Participation:** Students are expected to engage actively through discussion, peer feedback, and applied learning activities that support collective inquiry and critical reflection.
- **Applied Assignments:** Students will complete a series of individual and collaborative assignments designed to develop AI literacy and judgment in governance. These interconnected assignments may involve analyzing real-world AI applications, hands-on AI interaction lab, evaluating organizational and institutional choices, and assessing governance risks and trade-offs in public and nonprofit contexts.
- **Final Project:** The course concludes in an individual/collaborative project in which students synthesize course concepts to evaluate or design a context-sensitive AI governance approach for a public or nonprofit organization. The project emphasizes integrating technical understanding with ethical reasoning, institutional analysis, and leadership judgment.

Schedule / Outline of Topics
- Week 1: Course Overview and Expectations
- Week 2: AI as Part of Government and Nonprofit Governance
- Week 3: Where AI is Used in Government and Nonprofits Today
- Week 4: How Intelligent Systems Change Decision-Making and Authority
- Week 5: How AI Systems Work: Basics for Public and Nonprofit Leaders
- Week 6: What AI Can and Cannot Do: Capabilities, Limits, and Hallucinations
- Week 7: How Data, Design, and Prompts Shape AI Behavior
- Week 8: Why AI Projects Succeed or Fail in Practice
- Week 9: Human-AI Decision-Making and Accountability
- Week 10: Procurement and Vendor Control in the Public Sector AI
- Week 11: Ethics and Responsibility in AI Systems
- Week 12: Social, Environmental, and Privacy Impacts of AI
- Week 13: Governing AI Risks and Building Public Trust
- Week 14: Final Projects and Course Reflection

Texts / Materials / Resources
The selection of textbooks and readings will vary by instructor. Listed below are some of the possible textbooks, materials, and resources an instructor may select for this course:
- Narayanan, A., & Kapoor, S. (2025). AI Snake Oil: What Artificial Intelligence Can Do, What It Can't, and How to Tell the Difference. Princeton University Press.
- Acemoglu, D., & Johnson, S. (2023). Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity (1st edition). PublicAffairs.
- Kanter, B., & Fine, A. H. (2022). The Smart Nonprofit: Staying Human-Centered in an Automated World. Wiley.

The instructor will also provide journal/magazine articles each week.