Governance: Taking Stock and Moving Forward

There is perhaps no concept more influential in contemporary studies of government, public administration, and public policy than “governance”. Emerging against the backdrop of scholarly dissatisfaction with both Classical Public Administration and New Public Management paradigms, governance research now addresses numerous issues and processes including policy networks, political steering, service delivery, and joined-up government. Governance analysis also ranges across different scales or levels of public action from the global to the local. Moreover, the concept has also been ‘stretched’ in the form of ‘meta-governance’, ‘associational governance’ and ‘entrepreneurial governance’. Yet, governance remains a contested, even slippery, concept. How does it capture enduring political questions of power and accountability? What policy instruments are most suited to governance, and do choices vary across scales or levels? More broadly, what is the substantive intellectual benefit of making governance rather than government the focal point for analysis of state-society relations. This course will take-up these questions in an historical and comparative fashion, exploring the emergence of the governance concept, its evolution over time in Political Science literatures and its application across policy fields, and assess the normative and empirical consequences of the ‘governance turn’.