GC 520 — Organizational Theory & Governance (14-week syllabus)

Every pursuit is run by an organization — a firm, a team, a coalition — and every organization is run by rules, incentives, and decision rights. This course supplies the organizational theory the discipline runs on: why organizations exist, how they govern, where the ethical walls are, and how the public side and the private side hold each other accountable.

Course number: GC 520 · **Credits:** 3 · **Format:** 14 weeks, one 75-minute session per week (plus reading and a weekly written deliverable). **Audience:** Graduate students in the MS in Capture Management & Government Business Development. **Prerequisites:** None beyond the program's foundations. **Recommended companion:** GC 501 (microeconomics) — this course is the firm-side companion to the market-side course. **Texts:** the doctrine and literacy folders of this repository; the course reader (agency theory, organization design, and procurement-governance materials). No software required — the course is stack-agnostic by design (doctrine/08).

Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, a student can:

- Explain why organizations exist (transaction costs, agency costs) and why the federal market is run through a particular set of organizational forms.
- Use agency theory to explain the fundamental problem of public procurement: the government (principal) buys from a firm (agent) under asymmetric information, and the rules are the mechanism that makes that relationship survivable.
- Explain the FAR as governance technology: a machinery for forcing fairness, disclosure, and accountability out of an inherently asymmetric relationship.
- Design a gate governance system for a pursuit organization: the criteria written in advance, the decision rights, the owners, and the accountability loop.
- Locate the ethical boundaries of the discipline: the procurement-integrity rules, the organizational-conflict-of-interest (OCI) regime, and the ethical walls that keep the game fair.
- Identify and manage conflicts of interest — both the legal kind (FAR 9.5 OCI) and the organizational kind (a capture leader who decides whether to pursue the project they hope to win).
- Analyze multi-organizational forms — prime/sub, joint venture, mentor-protege, consortium — as governance structures with distinct decision rights and risks.
- Diagnose governance failure from real procurement scandals and design the control that would have prevented it.

- Build the learning loop into the organization: debriefs, retrospectives, and the honest post-mortem.

Weekly schedule

Week	Theme	In-session (75 min)	Reading / material	Assignment due next week
1	Organizations as governance structures	Why a firm, not a market, for pursuit work? The boundary of the firm; the ORBITAL as a governance skeleton for a single pursuit.	doctrine/06; the course reader on organizational theory	One-page analysis: which ORBITAL axes are governance mechanisms, and which are resource commitments?
2	The principal–agent problem	The government buys from a firm that knows more than it does. Adverse selection, moral hazard, and the information problem at the heart of procurement.	doctrine/04; the course reader on agency theory	Memo: locate the agency problem in a real solicitation — where does the buyer not know what the seller knows, and what does the rulebook force the seller to reveal?

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3	The FAR as governance technology	The rulebook as a fairness machine: disclosure, competition, accountability. What the rules protect, and who bears the cost of following them.	doctrine/02; doctrine/04; literacy/how-to-read-an-rfp	Short paper: defend or attack the proposition that the FAR is a governance technology, not a burden.
4	Gates as decision systems	The four parts of a gate; owner-with-standing vs. owner-with-process; the ladder of governance for a full pursuit. Designing gates that survive pressure.	doctrine/04; the gate canon at concept altitude	Gate charter: write the complete gate structure for a case pursuit — criteria, evidence, decision owner, escalation.
5	Procurement integrity	The integrity regime: what the rules prohibit, why the system treats integrity as structural rather than personal, and the professional's obligation inside it.	doctrine/04; the course reader on procurement integrity	Integrity memo: map the integrity exposure of a typical pursuit org and the controls that contain it.

Week	Theme	In-session (75 min)	Reading / material	Assignment due next week
6	Ethical walls and ethical firewalls	Information barriers inside a firm: the wall between capture and evaluation, between business development and proposal, between teammates who compete elsewhere. When a wall is structural, not a matter of trust.	doctrine/04; the course reader on ethical walls	Case analysis: design the ethical wall for a firm that both primes one pursuit and subs on a competitor's team for another.
7	Organizational conflicts of interest	FAR 9.5 OCI: biased ground rules, unequal access to information, impaired objectivity. Why OCI is a knockout, not a risk. The relationship between OCI and the ethical wall.	the OCI canon at concept altitude; doctrine/04	OCI screening: run a real solicitation and a case firm through the OCI categories; state the disposition for each.

Week	Theme	In-session (75 min)	Reading / material	Assignment due next week
8	Governance of the pursuit organization	Decision rights across the pipeline: who can say yes, who can say no, who can escalate. The RACI of a capture org; the accountability loop.	doctrine/03; doctrine/04	Org design: draw the governance map of a pursuit organization — the gates, the owners, the escalation path, the accountability loop.
9	Midterm	In-class examination: analyze a real governance situation — an organization, its decision rights, its integrity exposure, its OCI posture — and redesign it.	(review weeks 1–8)	Midterm submission.
10	Multi-organizational forms	Prime/sub, JV, mentor-protege, consortium as governance structures. Who holds decision rights, where the seams are, and what each form's failure modes are.	the teaming/JV canon at concept altitude; doctrine/07	Memo: compare two organizational forms for a case pursuit — decision rights, risk, and governance seams.

Week	Theme	In-session (75 min)	Reading / material	Assignment due next week
11	Incentive design inside the firm	Compensation, authority, and information inside a pursuit org. How the firm's own incentives align (or misalign) with the market's incentives. B&P budgets as governance.	doctrine/05; the course reader on organizational incentives	Memo: design an incentive structure for a capture team that rewards disciplined pursuit, not volume of chasing.
12	Governance failures	Real procurement scandals as case studies: what broke, which control was missing, what the lesson is. The anatomy of a governance failure.	the course reader on procurement failures; doctrine/04	Post-mortem: take a published procurement scandal and write the control that would have prevented it.

Week	Theme	In-session (75 min)	Reading / material	Assignment due next week
13	The learning organization	Debriefs, retrospectives, the post-mortem that is not a blame exercise. The learning loop (analyze → sequence → evolve) as an organizational capability.	doctrine/03; doctrine/07	Retrospective design: build a debrief-and-retrospective system for a pursuit org, with the honest-post-mortem rules stated.
14	Synthesis: the governed pursuit organization	The whole course in one frame: a pursuit organization is a governance system — gates, walls, decision rights, and a learning loop. Final panel defense of the governance design.	(course synthesis)	Final paper: "The governance of [your] pursuit organization," 2,500 words, defended before a panel.

Assessment summary

- **Weekly deliverables — 40%.** Each a concrete governance artifact (a gate charter, a wall design, an OCI screening, a retrospective system).
- **Midterm — 25%.** In-class governance analysis and redesign.
- **Final paper + panel defense — 25%.** A complete governance design for a pursuit organization, defended before a panel that probes the seams.
- **Participation and peer review — 10%.**

The graduate rubric

Criterion	Excellent	Proficient	Developing
Organizational reasoning	Uses the right theory and applies it to the specific organization	Right theory, weaker application	Theory absent or decorative
Governance precision	Decision rights, criteria, owners, and escalation paths are explicit	Mostly explicit	Vague on who decides and how
Integrity discipline	Walls and OCI posture are structural, correct, and defensible	Sound but informal	Boundary unclear or unsafe
Accountability	The design closes the learning loop; failure is a design input	Loop present but weak	No learning loop

Policies

- **Integrity is the subject and the standard.** This course teaches procurement integrity; it also enforces it. Fabricated evidence, invented cases, or misrepresented work fails the assessment.
- **Real organizations, safe analysis.** We analyze real organizations, real solicitations, and real published failures — never a live competition and never privileged information from a student's employer.
- **Late work.** An honest early warning beats a silent late submission.

The market trusts organizations that govern themselves. This course is where you learn to build one.