SYLLABUS FOR

PPA 500 – THESIS SEMINAR

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

Spring 2007

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Office Hours: Thursday, 3:00 – 5:45 p.m., and by appointment if necessary.

Course Held: Tuesday, 6:00 – 8:50 p.m., ARC 1007, the first night we meet is January 30
other specific dates are noted in the schedule below.

Required Reading Material:

Studies, CSUS, available free on web at www.csus.edu/gradstudies/forms/Thesis.pdf;

for purchase at bookstore or on web at Amazon.Com (click on this link to find it there).
Many PPA students have already purchased this manual for an earlier class;

available for purchase at bookstore or on web at Amazon.Com (click on this link to find
it there);

(4) Optional (but highly recommended) - Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and
Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article; 1986, Howard S. Becker, Chicago Press; available
for purchase at bookstore or on web at Amazon.Com (click on this link to find it there).

I would strongly recommend that all readings be obtained during the January break and
you get a head start by reading much of this material before we meet.

Internet Access:

Access to the Internet is also required for this class. If you do not have it at work or
home, access is provided to students at the university library. Some of the links given
here require the use of a Sac Link account to access.
Objective:

This course provides faculty and peer guidance in preparation of material to satisfy the Master’s thesis requirement. This includes clarification of general program expectations, familiarization with research resources, presentation of models of effective policy and administrative analytical reports, and provision of basic support in a structured environment of feedback.

Method:

Each class session will include interactive work sessions involving students reporting on progress and problem solving with peer feedback and consultation. Students are required to complete all assignments and consult with their project committee throughout the semester.

I would estimate that besides the three hours of classroom time required every other week in the first two-thirds of the semester, the successful completion of this course will require an additional **minimum** of 10 hours a week of work outside of the classroom. This amount is likely to **grow larger** in the final weeks of the semester.

Be aware that there is university wide thesis writing groups that you can also join. They are described at [http://www.csus.edu/wac/thesis_groups.stm](http://www.csus.edu/wac/thesis_groups.stm).

Prerequisite:

To enroll in this course you must have completed all but one of the courses in the Public Policy and Administration Program [PPA 200, 205, 207, 210, 220A, 220B, 230, 240 (or 240A and 240B if appropriate), plus two electives] with at least a B- in each course and an average grade of B or better in all. Accordingly, students cannot enroll in PPA 500 until their last semester of course work and are no longer allowed to take more than one course (other than an internship course) in addition to PPA 500. It is also necessary to have advanced to candidacy before enrolling in PPA 500. Ted Lascher is authorized to modify these restrictions (but not the advancement to candidacy mandate, which is a University requirement) in exceptional circumstances.

PPA 500B:

There is no longer a formal second semester of PPA 500. Students will now need to take PPA 500 (in the manner presented here) a second time if they fail to complete an acceptable Master’s project in one semester or their primary advisor feels they will not be able to fully complete it until after next semester.

Primary and Secondary Advisors:

All students are required by the first (preferred) or second (mandatory) meeting to have developed a thesis question and named primary and secondary advisors who have agreed to supervise and assist in the completion of the assignments required for this class. A form for this purpose, which must be turned into me, is included at the end of this syllabus. A primary advisor can be drawn from Professors Ceja, Gerth, Hodson, Jensen,
Kirlin, Lascher, Moulds, Shulock, Wassmer, and Waste. A secondary advisor can be chosen from among this same group, part-time PPA instructors Detwiller and Booher, and other part and full-time professors and instructors at CSUS. I suggest you work on developing your thesis question and lining up your advisors in the January break preceding the class (if you have not done so already). We intend to have primary advisor roles divided up equally among PPA professors and thus it is essential that you secure the permission of your desired advisors early. If a primary advisor already has their share of thesis supervision they can suggest another PPA professor that you should contact.

You should try to be in weekly contact with your primary advisor throughout the semester. All the assignments listed here are to be given to them and me on the due dates. Your advisor will get comments back to you by the next week’s meeting. Individual arrangements should be made with your secondary advisor on the specific amount of contact to occur during the semester, but all assignments should also be shared with that person and a meeting with the secondary advisor should occur at least once a month. Remember that both your primary and secondary advisors must sign off on your final product. It is essential that they be both be “kept in the loop” throughout the semester.

Research Partner:

Each student will be paired with another who is registered in this class. This person will serve as a partner in their quest to finish the thesis. Besides their primary and secondary advisors, this partner will serve as a sounding board, confidant, and a third set of eyes to read all that is written. This is meant to be a reciprocal relationship where your help will be equally rewarded by the help of another. Please secure this person’s signature also on the sheet attached to syllabus.

Format of Class Meetings:

This course will meet a total of five times from 6 to no later than 8:50 p.m. on Tuesday nights throughout the spring semester. It is essential that you attend all class meetings. Most meetings have reading assignments that must be completed before class meeting (preferably well before; i.e., this January if possible). This is absolutely not a lecture-based course. The format of most classes will be one hour of student-based discussion on how the reading assignments generally apply to thesis projects. The remaining two hours will be devoted to discussion on specific concerns that students have at the current stage of their work. All students are required to participate in these discussions and should come prepared to class each week with a summary of progress in the previous week, and questions/concerns that need to be addressed. Expect to be called on often to make such a report.

Grades:

There are only two grades that can be obtained in this class: satisfactory progress or fail. I will ask your primary advisor as to what they feel you should get and assign that grade. In the past a satisfactory progress meant that you either finished your thesis this semester, or more likely were capable of finishing over the break between the next semester, or
during the next semester. Please talk to your primary advisor to find out what his/her expectation is.

Schedule:

The following schedule lists the major topics covered each week and the assigned reading that accompanies them, as well as an assignment that is due that week. I reserve the right to make minor changes and additions to the schedule.

Note that while specific assignments are listed throughout the semester, beyond the first two assignments, the order and number may be modified with the consent of your primary thesis advisor. This should be done in the schedule that is to be turned in at the second meeting (an example of such a schedule is given in the appendix). I recognize that particular students may have needs that are best met by modifying the general pattern set forth for completion of the master’s project.

Underlined items are hyperlinked. Assignments in red are due at the start of class and a copy should be given to me and your primary advisor.

Session 1 – January 30

Background and Goals

Memo on New Culminating Project Guidelines

Process

CSUS Guide for Thesis Format

Review of PPA Department Human Subjects Guidelines

Define Your Problem


Literature Review

Galvin, Chapters 1 - 5

Assignment Due: (1) one-page prospectus/memo defining your problem and explaining why it is important, who is affected, and the general scope of issue (see example offered in appendix- you will also be asked to make a two minute statement on your thesis question) and (2) draft or final completion of Thesis Question, Advisors’ and Research Partner’s Signatures Sheet (included here for you to fill out).
Session 2 – February 13

Thesis and Report Examples

Ask your primary advisor for relevant examples from PPA students they supervised in the past. I have a stack of theses in my office that I am willing to share if they are returned. Here are few others that I have in electronic form. Look them over and come with questions on style and format for your thesis.


Sample Project: Mary Kay Patton, *Using Linked Databases to Streamline Service Delivery and Improve Program Planning in Family Health Programs* (PDF)

Sample Project: Mary Victoria Stuart, *An Analysis of Policy Alternatives to Promote California’s Tire Recycling Markets* (PDF)

Literature Review

Hacker, Description of APA style

Galvin, Chapters 5 – 10

Becker Chapter 8 (Terrorized By the Literature)

Assignment Due: (1) Five minute presentation before class on thesis question, outline of sections contained in your thesis, and proposed dates of completion (bring enough paper copies of outline and schedule for all – an example is given in the appendix to this syllabus) and (2) Final Completion of Thesis Question, Advisors’ and Research Partner’s Signatures Sheet to be turned into me.

Session 3 – February 27

Analysis and Writing Style


Assignment Due: Draft of Chapter (2) “Literature Review” or Section (1) “Define the Problem” or alternative agreed upon with primary advisor (each person to make a five minute presentation).

Session 4 – March 13

Discussion
Becker Chapter 1 (Freshman English for Graduate Students)
Becker Chapter 2 (Persona and Authority)
Becker Chapter 5 (Learning to Write as a Professional)
Becker Chapter 6 (Risk)

Assignment Due: Draft of Chapter (3) “Methodology” or Sections (2-4) “Environment,” “Alternatives,” and “Criteria” or alternative agreed upon with primary advisor (each person to make a five minute presentation).

Session 5 – April 10

Discussion

Becker Chapter 3 (One Right Way)
Becker Chapter 4 (Editing By Ear)
Becker Chapter 7 (Getting It Out the Door)

Assignment Due: Draft of Chapter (4) “Results” or Section (5) “Analysis of Alternatives” or alternative agreed upon with primary advisor (each person to make a five minute presentation).
Appendix I: Prospectus Example

Prospectus for Thesis on Teenage Birthrates
Deborah Franklin
Working Title: Teen Birthrates in California: What Really Matters?
Major Advisor: Rob Wassmer
Secondary Advisor: Nancy Shulock

Why study teenage birthrates?

Over the last decade, the issue of teenage birthrates has received attention in the media, legislatures, and political speeches. An article on world population problems in a recent issue of National Geographic (2001) included the United States as an example of a nation with a worsening population problem, its teenage birthrate.

How large is the problem of teenage childbearing in the U.S? The teenage birthrate in the U.S. is five percent, which is five percent of teen girls aged 15 to 19 give birth each year. The U.S. has the highest teenage birthrate in the industrialized world. Since 1960, the teenage birthrate has tripled among unmarried females aged 15-19.

Teenage childbearing is expensive. Welfare, food stamps, and Medicaid expenditures for families begun by a teenage mother totaled $37 billion in 1995. In 1996, The Robin Hood Foundation estimated that teenage parenthood in America cost taxpayers $6.9 billion a year in increased costs for welfare and food stamps benefits, medical care, incarceration, and foster care. The 1996-97 California State budget included $73 million in teen pregnancy prevention programs. Funding for prevention programs continues in this year’s budget. Despite prevention efforts, in 1997 in California 59,851 births were to teenage mothers, a birthrate of 56.7 births per 1000 women aged 15-19.

One of the costs related to teenage childbearing is dropping out of high school. Hoffman, Foster, and Furstenberg examined the costs of teenage motherhood and found that teen mothers completed fewer years of education. Only 54% graduated from high school, but an estimated 71% would have graduated if they had delayed childbearing until they were 20 years old. Conversely, dropping out of high school has an effect on teenage childbearing. Leibowitz, Eisen, and Chow (1998) studied pregnant teens in Ventura County and reported that teens who reported higher grades in high school were more likely to choose abortion, and teens that had already dropped out of high school were more likely to give birth. Plotnick (2002) considered the attitudes of teens and its effect on decisions to abort, give birth before marriage, or give birth after marriage. Interestingly, the variables for educational expectation were significantly and positively related to both abortion and marriage before birth. The relationship between teen birthrates and high school dropout rates is both complicated and important to our understanding of teenage childbearing.

The success of efforts to lower the teenage birthrate depends on an understanding of the factors that influence the birthrate. While the teenage birthrate has been steadily dropping
in California, it is still high enough to generate concern among policymakers and residents. In my research, I will look for some of the underlying factors that contribute to our state’s teenage birthrate and then consider their implications for public policy.

The Question

*Teenage Pregnancy and Birth in California: Trends and Characteristics* provides an excellent overview of teen birthrates in California. It concluded that, in general, birthrates vary by race/ethnicity and poverty level. For my thesis, I am interested in other factors that may be related to teenage birthrates. My research for PPA 207 indicates that the high school dropout rates are an important factor. However, teenage birthrates and high school dropout rates have an endogenous relationship. For my thesis I plan to focus my efforts on finding the distinct factors related to each of those rates. The central question that I will be addressing is what cultural, economic, educational, and home and community environmental factors are related to the teenage birthrate. Another question that I will be addressing is what cultural, economic, educational, and home and community environmental factors are related to high school dropout rates. I also want to examine how teenage birthrates and dropout rates impact each other and the magnitude of one’s impact on the other.

Methodology

Building on my PPA 207 paper, I will be using regression analysis of aggregate data at the county level as my primary research method. I plan to increase the variables in my original county birthrate variance regression analysis by including a variable for the rate of population change in each county. I will also include a variable for accessibility to reproductive health services. I also plan to use aggregate county level data and regression models to analyze factors related to high school dropout rates. From these multivariate regression models and the theory underlying the models, I hope to be able to draw inferences about the relationship between teenage birthrates and high school dropout rates.
Appendix II: Suggested Five Chapter Outline for PPA Thesis

Below is one way to think about the organization of Master's project in a traditional six-section format. You should work out the specific format of your thesis with your principal advisor. Ten to 12 pages would be the suggested lengths for each section.

Chapter 1: Introduction
What is the question you are investigating? In theory and application, why is this question important? Relate the topic to the public policy and/or administrative material you have learned in this program, cite general interest publications that raise the importance of this topic. Describe how the rest of your thesis/project will flow.

Chapter 2: Literature Review
What is already known about this issue? Review a select sample of academic literature, existing reports, and/or policy/administrative history of this issue. Reference the material you have been exposed to in the program. Conclude with a summary of what gaps in our understanding/knowledge of the topic your research will fill. Identify the specific variables involved in your study.

Chapter 3: Methodology
What is the method you will use to gather the facts to answer your research question? Include data collection and data analysis methods. Be specific and detailed.

Chapter 4: Results
Present your findings with an analysis. Save the major findings and conclusions for Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications
Summarize what you have done in each of the previous chapters and then draw conclusions. What does your analysis say? What are the answers you have derived to your research questions? What surprised you? What could you not find? Any suggestions you could offer on how to do differently?
Appendix III: Suggested Six Section Outline for Thesis Based On Cam Analysis

Below is another way to think about the organization of Master's project in a six-section format. You should work out the specific format of your thesis with your principal advisor. Ten pages would be the suggested lengths for each section.

Section 1: Define the Problem

I. Specific problem
II. Larger context and background
III. Others' experiences
IV. Literature review

Section 2: Environment

I. Political environment and constraints
II. Legal mandates and issues
III. Economic factors
IV. Social issues

Section 3: Alternatives

I. Analyze causes of problem
II. Define the variables inherent in alternatives
III. Reduce and simplify number of alternatives

Section 4: Criteria

I. Select and justify criteria for evaluating alternatives (e.g. cost/benefit, equity, political feasibility, accountability)
II. Relative weighting of criteria
III. Methodology

Section 5: Analysis of Alternatives

I. Project outcomes of all alternatives
II. Analyze outcomes in terms of criteria
III. Summarize and contrast alternatives
IV. Confront the trade-offs

Section 6: Recommendation and Conclusions

I. Tailor recommendation to proper audience/clients
II. Long-term versus short-term issues
III. Pay attention to implementation
APPENDIX IV: EXAMPLE OF SCHEDULED OUTLINE OF PARTIAL COMPLETION FOR SEMESTER (FULL COMPLETION BY FALL 2007)

February 27 – Draft of Literature Review Section to Principal Advisor
    March 6 – Comments Due Back from Principal Advisor

March 13 – Draft of Methodology Section to Principal Advisor
    March 20 – Comments Due Back from Principal Advisor

April 10 – Draft of Results Section to Principal Advisor
    April 17 – Comments Due Back from Principal Advisor

May 8 – Draft of Conclusion and Implications Section to Principal Advisor
    May 15 – Comments Due Back from Principal Advisor

June 5 – Draft of Introduction Section to Principal Advisor
    June 12 – Comments Due Back from Principal Advisor

Summer 2007 – Work on Suggested Revisions

September 3 – Submit Revised Draft of Entire Thesis to Principal Advisor

Student’s Signature: _______________________________________________________

Primary Advisor’s Signature: _____________________________________________
PPA 500

Spring 2007

Thesis Question, and Advisors’ and Research Partner’s Signatures

Absolutely Due February 13 (preferred due date is January 30)

Student’s Name: ________________________________________________________

Thesis Question:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
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________________________________________________________________________

Primary Advisor’s Signature: ______________________________________________

Secondary Advisor’s Signature: ____________________________________________

Research Partner’s Signature: _____________________________________________