PPA 500 Syllabus
Spring 2015

Master's Program in Public Policy and Administration
Master's Program in Urban Land Development
Sacramento State

Professor: Rob Wassmer

Phone: 278-6304
E-Mail: rwassme@csus.edu
Website: www.csus.edu/indiv/w/wassmerr

Office: 3037 Tahoe Hall
Office Hours: Mondays, Tuesday, and Thursday of Class Meeting (4 to 5:30 p.m.)

Meeting Dates: Wednesdays on January 28, February 18, March 4, and March 18
Meeting Time: 6:00 to 8:50 pm (max)
Meeting Location: ARC 1009

Required Text:

(1) Writing for Social Scientists, 1986, Howard S. Becker, Chicago University Press, available for purchase on web at Amazon.Com (used $3.96 on 12/27/14);


(3) A Pocket Style Manual, 2000, Diana Hacker, Third Edition (or later), Bedford Books; available for purchase at Amazon.Com. Most PPA students have already purchased this manual for an earlier class.

Course Objective:
The goal of PPA 500 is to help students complete their thesis by the week of May 4, 2015. Details on how to sign up for your required thesis review is at http://www.csus.edu/gradstudies/CurrentStudents/Thesis-Project-Dissertation/Submission-and-Deadlines.html.

To that end, 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 and appropriate deadlines, support in completion of theses, and provision of basic support in a structured environment of feedback.

At a minimum, to receive satisfactory progress in this class, you will need to satisfy what your primary advisor deems as necessary to do this. Please clarify this with him/her at the start of the
semester. (For my advisees I set this as three completed thesis chapters). You will also need to attend, and complete assignments, for all four meeting dates.

**Format of Course and Expectations of Students:**

Each class session will include interactive sessions involving students reporting on progress and problem solving with peer feedback and consultation. As instructor of record, I provide general guidance and support, but your primary obligation is to your primary and secondary advisors.

We will meet four times throughout the semester to keep each other on track and provide assistance as necessary. You must come prepared to discuss your own work and to support the work of others. *An assignment is due each meeting.*

**Prerequisites:**

To enroll in PPA 500, you must have completed all but one of your core courses in the Public Policy and Administration Program (PPA 200, 205, 207, 210, 220A, 220B, 230, 240A, 240B) plus one elective, with at least a B- in each course and an average grade of B or better in all. (Or the equivalent for a MSULD student). Accordingly, students cannot enroll in PPA 500 until their last semester of course work and be enrolled in no more than two courses along with PPA 500. (Though I recommend that you only take one or zero additional courses in the semester enrolled in PPA 500.) It is also necessary to have advanced to candidacy before enrolling in PPA 500. Only PPA Chairperson Kirlin can modify these restrictions (except the advancement to candidacy mandate, which is a University requirement) in exceptional circumstances.

**Primary and Secondary Advisors:**

Before the first meeting, all students must have developed a thesis question and named their primary advisor who has agreed to supervise and assist in the completion of their thesis.

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.

Preferences about reading differ for second readers and different “pairs” of readers work differently. Some like to see each piece, others prefer to see a complete draft. Make individual arrangements with your secondary advisor on the specific amount of contact to occur during the semester. 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.

You may choose your primary advisor from Professors Gossett, Jez, Kirlin, Lascher, Venezia, and Wassmer. A secondary advisor comes from this same group and part-time PPA Instructors Boilard and Detwiller, and other part and full-time professors and instructors at Sacramento State. In some cases, you may work with retired PPA faculty (which now includes Professors Booher and Shulock).

You will need to stay on schedule. Faculty will work to return the items in timely fashion, but that is first dependent on you keeping to your agreed upon schedule.
Research Partner:

At our first meeting, you will pair with another student registered in this class. This person will serve as your partner in a quest to finish the thesis. This partner can serve as a sounding board, confidant, and a third set of eyes to read your drafts. This is a reciprocal relationship where your help gains the help of another.

Format of Class Meetings:

This course will meet from 6:00 pm to no later than 8:50 p.m. on four nights throughout the semester. This is not a lecture-based course. All students are required to participate in these discussions and should come prepared to class each week having competed the specific assignment, the Becker readings, and be ready to discuss, and have formulated a summary of their progress in the previous weeks, and questions/concerns to address. Expect to make such a report. We may also have students who are “sitting in” a term ahead of being registered for PPA 500 and those who completed 500, but have not finished their thesis.

Assignments and Grading:

There are only two grades for this class: Reasonable Progress (RP) or Fail (F). I will ask your primary advisor what you have earned and assign that grade.

Reasonable Progress means that you either finished your thesis this semester, or are capable of finishing in the next semester. The standard by which to judge the second qualification is to be determined between you and your primary advisor and usually involves a minimum number of completed chapters. Please talk to your primary advisor to find out what his/her expectation is. When you complete your thesis and turn into the University, the RP grade converts to Credit on your transcript for PPA 500.

If you do not receive a passing grade in 500, you may take it one more time. If you do not pass the course a second time, you receive a dismissal from the University and have to reapply to finish. Given the constraints on admissions, this would require you to compete directly with incoming students for a seat. We will not look favorably on these petitions. Please expect to finish the thesis the term you take PPA 500.

Schedule:

Prior to First Meeting

Minimum before January 25, 2014:

(1) Send electronic copy of “PPA 500: Thesis Question and Advisors' Names” (given in Appendix 1) to rwassme@csus.edu and your primary advisor;

(2) Send electronic copy of two-page prospectus/memo defining your problem and explaining why it is important, who is affected, and the general scope of issue (example given in Appendix II) to rwassme@csus.edu and your primary advisor.

Ideal before January 25, 2014:
(3) Complete drafts of either Chapters 1 or 2 of your thesis and send to rwassme@csus.edu and your primary advisor.

Session 1 – January 28

Background and Goals

Process

Human Subjects Approval

Advice to Students Enrolled in PPA 500 Next Semester

Assignment Due: Bring 16, double-spaced, paper copies of your two-page prospectus/memo (which was due January 25) defining your problem and explaining why it is important, who is affected, and the general scope of issue to be handed out to all PPA 500 participants. Each of you will offer a 5 to 10 minute presentation/discussion on their thesis topic to the entire class. In this presentation, be sure to raise issues/concerns that you have encountered in your drafting of the first two chapters of your thesis (or at a minimum your prospectus). While listening to presentation, you should think of at least one comment and write it down on the handout they gave to you. We will do this together for the first one.

You are also to have done all of the readings below in the Becker book. Two students (in bold below) are given the responsibility for presenting the highlights of the chapter (as they relate to helping you write for a thesis) to the class. I will call upon you to do this.

Readings for Discussion: Becker – Prefaces (J. Preciado, R. Bayardo, and A. Carhart), Chapter 1 - Freshman English for Graduate Students (S. Adan and J. Calbonero), Chapter 2 - Persona and Authority (C. White and T. Palmer).

Session 2 – February 18

Assignment Due: Bring 16 paper copies of the outline you have worked out for the rest of your thesis with your primary advisor that includes specific dates when remaining chapters (or other achievement points) completed so the entire thesis done in early May. Be ready to make a five to 10 minute presentation on this to entire class. Also, raise concerns/setbacks/snaus you have encountered in the thesis process.

Readings for Discussion: Becker – Chapter 3 - One Right Way (S. Soltani and A. Trujillo), Chapter 4 - Editing by Ear (H. Blodgett and Y. Gojnic), and Chapter 5 - Learning to Write as a Professional (C. Ordonez and R. Pistocini).

Session 3 – March 4

Assignment Due: Be prepared to give the class a five to 10 minute presentation on the methodology that you are using in your thesis. Bring 16 paper copies of a handout that describes this. Use this as an opportunity to seek feedback on questions/concerns that you may have. While listening to presentation, you should think of at least one comment and write it down on the handout they gave to you. We will do this together for the first one.
Session 4 – March 18

As a class, we will review the University thesis formatting requirements. The University now requires that students take a formatting course (done by attending this session) or complete the online class. If you do this in class, you get a signoff sheet at the end. This session will discuss final logistics for turning the thesis in and graduation.

Assignment Due: Be prepared to give the class a five-minute presentation on the progress you are making on your thesis. Use this as an opportunity to seek feedback on questions/concerns that you may have.

Appendix I: Thesis Question and Advisors’ Names

Student's Name: ____________________________________________________________

One-Sentence Thesis Question:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Primary advisor's Name: ____________________________________________________

Secondary advisor's Name: _________________________________________________
Appendix II: 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 (1989) 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 (2000) 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 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 affects 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 III: Suggested Five Chapter Outline for Traditional 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 do we know about this issue? Review a select sample of academic literature, existing reports, and/or policy/administrative history of this issue. Reference the relevant material learned in PPA 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? Offer any suggestions on how to do this differently.
Appendix IV: Suggested Outline for PPA “Project” Thesis

A project thesis can look different from a traditional thesis. Your particular project may have additional sections or chapters; it will depend on what your audience needs to know. 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 chapter.

Chapter 1: Introduction
What is this project trying to address? What is the genesis of the project? Who is the audience? What issue(s) are you investigating? Most project-oriented theses have a clear practical application, what is it? How will you be using more traditional theory and research to help inform the issue? 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: What do we know and what am I adding -- a somewhat modified literature review and methodology section
What is driving the need for this project, what background information is important? What do we know about this issue? Review existing reports, and/or policy/administrative/political history of this issue. As you talk about how you are going to tackle the issue (your approach or methodology), you will likely be including some “theory” or framework. Make sure you talk about this literature as well. Reference the material exposed to in the program as appropriate. What is the method you will use to gather the facts to answer your research question? Include any data collection and data analysis methods. Be specific and detailed.

Chapter 3: Results/analysis/Your Work
Describe your work? What did you discover? Present your findings with an analysis. This should be readable! Remember to show your information/findings in multiple formats, “pictures, words, and numbers.” “Tufte-ize” your findings, make them a delight to read.

Chapter 4: Conclusions
Summarize what you have done in each of the previous chapters and then draw conclusions. What does your analysis say? What are the recommendations and/or implications of what you found? What surprised you? What could you not find? What else should practitioners and researchers need to do to help address this issue? Make sure you return to the big questions you raised at the beginning in your concluding write up.
Appendix V: Suggested Six Paragraph 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.

Chapter 1: Define the Problem

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

Chapter 2: Environment

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

Chapter 3: Alternatives

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

Chapter 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

Chapter 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

Chapter 6: Recommendation and Conclusions

I. Tailor recommendation to proper audience/clients
II. Long-term versus short-term issues
III. Pay attention to implementation
Thoughts from recent alumni…

Helpful to:

1. Have the problem statement defined and signed off by both advisors before first night of class.

2. A completed review of literature needs to done before first night of PPA 500.

3. Thought needs to given to the entire research process (sampling, methodology, analysis) before PPA 500.

4. Develop a schedule of completion.

5. Update advisors frequently (about every other week) even if it is to tell them bad news.

6. Once beginning writing process, just sitting down and writing whatever came into my head and not worrying about how it sounded, citation, etc.

7. Writing for Social Scientists (red book) - this for me because I was nervous about sitting down and writing.

8. Have good working relationship with advisors.

9. If you are doing a survey, start the university paperwork going right away. Do a trial run to make sure you are going to get meaningful responses to the questions.

10. Get the thesis format right from the beginning. Changing formatting midway can really mess with your text and table alignment.

11. Have person other than (and before and after) your advisors proofread your thesis for clarity and grammar.

About the thesis completion process:

1. Plan to go to the graduate studies thesis sign-off people at least twice (once with a final draft on regular paper, and once with the final draft on the pretty paper). Plan to spend a couple hours there each time.

2. Before going in for graduate studies thesis check, do use a ruler to check your margins on every page. Check the margins for the page numbers, text, and tables.

3. Coordinate availability with your advisors and the department chair so that you can get all of your signatures on time and without running around to fifty different places.