

PPA Guidelines for Thesis Second Readers

November 2018

OVERVIEW

This document provides guidelines for the role of second readers in the thesis review process. It aims to offer necessary clarity that will benefit students, second readers, and first readers alike.

BACKGROUND

Since its inception, the Department of Public Policy and Administration (PPA) has required that *all* graduate students produce a thesis. The thesis may take various forms, have significantly different aims, and use divergent methodologies, but in all cases is meant to be a significant piece of work that satisfies the University's culminating experience requirement.

The Department also requires that every thesis be approved by two readers. The "first reader" is the student's main advisor and has lead responsibility for approving the thesis. Thesis first readers must come from the ranks of the PPA full-time faculty members which at present include Su Jin Jez, Ted Lascher, Sara McClellan, Andrea Venezia, and Rob Wassmer. Second readers may also be full-time faculty members but may also include PPA lecturers, Sacramento State faculty members from other departments, and (with the approval of Graduate Studies) people with appropriate expertise outside the university such as administrators with state agencies.

Second readers may sometimes have interests and expertise like those of the primary advisor. In other cases, they may be chosen, often at the suggestion of first readers, because they offer substantive (e.g., in gerontology or environmental policy) or methodological expertise (e.g., in fuzzy set analysis) that complements those of the primary advisor.

Guidelines for the role of the second reader have remained largely informal, and often worked out collaboratively in discussions with the department chair and/or primary thesis advisors. With new faculty coming on board and new people from outside the University playing the role of second readers, we realize it is in everyone's best interest to offer more guidance. This may help to avoid misunderstandings or confusion about the activities that should be performed by second readers.

GUIDELINES

1. *The primary advisor retains lead responsibility for supervising a thesis*, including determining if the thesis question is appropriate, what approach should be used to address it, what data and analytical techniques are needed, etc. If disputes arise about whether a student has met requirements the second reader should defer to the primary advisor unless the second reader believes there is a compelling reason not to do so.
2. *At the beginning of the time in which the primary advisor and secondary reader are working with a particular student they should develop expectations for how the second reader will be involved.* We expect that these arrangements will vary depending on the inclinations of the readers and the needs of the student.

- a. In some cases, the second reader may be actively involved from the outset including helping to refine the question, identifying why it is important to address, determining appropriate methods, identifying data, etc. This should be done with the consent and support of the primary advisor, and with the understanding of the thesis student.
 - b. In other cases, the second reader may play a less active role. For example, the second reader might only become involved after the primary reader has reviewed and approved a portion of the thesis such as a prospectus or first chapter draft. Again, every effort should be made to clarify this at the outset, including to the thesis student.
3. *Second readers, especially those from outside the faculty, should be informed about departmental norms regarding thesis content and style.* These include the following:
 - a. **Review the current PPA 500 syllabus.** We strongly recommend that second readers from outside PPA review the most recent PPA 500 (thesis seminar) syllabus posted at <https://www.csus.edu/ppa/syllabi/> to get a sense of full-time faculty expectations as well as relevant deadlines, etc.
 - b. **Chapter outline.** Our syllabi for PPA 500 include examples of common outlines for a five-chapter traditional thesis and a four chapter “project” based thesis. Secondary readers may want to review these outlines to get a sense of where students may be headed in their thesis development.
 - c. **Literature review.** For PPA theses, our emphasis for the literature review is on *considering what has already been done related to the question at hand, and showing how the student’s thesis builds on that literature*, rather than demonstrating “command of the field” as is sometimes expected in other disciplines. This means that the extensiveness of the literature review may vary considerably from thesis to thesis depending on how much has already been done that relates directly to the student’s question.
 - d. **Length.** The appropriate length of a student thesis will depend on the type of question being asked and the information needed to address it. For example, a thesis that makes extensive use of qualitative interviews may of necessity be longer than a thesis using a secondary data set. There is no minimum length for a PPA thesis. In some cases it may be perfectly acceptable for the thesis to be about the length of a more extensive academic journal article, e.g., around 40 double spaced pages.
 - e. **Clarity.** The PPA faculty put primary writing emphasis on clarity of presentation. We urge students to avoid using jargon and overly complicated language. We recommend that secondary readers unfamiliar with PPA writing standards review “Writing an Analytical Paper for the PPA Program” which we hope will be helpful regarding our writing expectations.