PPA Pre-thesis Form:
Outlining your thesis plans and integrating the pieces

Use this form to diagram or write a narrative to: a) answer each question and b) begin the process of integrating the concepts you have learned throughout the PPA program into a coherent approach to writing the thesis. This form will be used to start/continue conversations with faculty members to help you find a first reader who is a good fit, to help you think about a second reader who might fill in certain knowledge and skills the first reader might not have, and to make sure that you are on track to complete a high quality thesis. You might want to fill out questions I-III and talk with your advisor before completing the rest of the form.

Your advisor(s) might ask you to revise this form multiple times to help you prepare for the writing process. ***The intent of this part of the process is to make sure that you are conceptualizing the thesis process appropriately.*** One component of writing an excellent thesis is having an over-arching framework that drives the structure; that is necessary to provide coherence across all of the chapters. Feel free to read through theses in PPA's thesis bank to help you understand the expectations (see: https://www.csus.edu/college/social-sciences-interdisciplinary-studies/public-policy-administration/thesis-project-bank.html#ppa-thesis/project-bank). You will notice quite a bit of variation across theses. The questions to address are as follows:

I.   What is your main research question(s)? What do you want to know? This can be a surprisingly difficult part of the process and framing a good question is critically important because it drives the rest of the process. Go back to *Approaches* from PPA 205 and re-read the information presented about research questions. You can use this space to test out a few ideas.

II.   Why do you think this topic is important (for policy, practice, etc.)?

III.   Do you have any hunches about what you might find out? If so, what is the evidence that supports your current assumptions? (It is ok if you do not have any hunches right now.)

IV.   What kinds of variables, issues, or criteria will you need to analyze/discuss in order to answer your research question(s)? Why are those the most important ones?

V.   What kinds of literature will you plan to read to prepare to write your thesis? Please list 3-5 examples of articles or books you will read and include a summary of how they will provide you with the information you need to describe the importance of your variables, issues, or criteria (this information will inform your introductory chapter). Some topics/questions have been extensively researched and, therefore, you will be adding to a body of existing knowledge. In other cases, you may need to think about parallel issues or broader concepts to understand how to frame your question. ***These variables, issues, or criteria are the components that will help you create a framework that will drive the structure of your thesis***.

VI.   What are your initial thoughts about how you will gather/find and analyze data/information to answer your question(s). In other words, what kind of methodology(ies) are you planning to use? In your answer, please clearly discuss how you will operationalize/measure your variables, issues, or criteria discussed in IV above. Make sure your proposed methodology(ies) are appropriate for your research question. For example, if you want to investigate *what* relationships are between certain factors, you will likely use quantitative methods. If you want to look at *why* or *how* certain things are happening, you will likely want to use qualitative methods. If you want to do all of the above, you will probably want to use mixed methods. Your research question will drive your choice of methodology(ies), not the reverse.

Where will your data come from? Do they exist already? Can you get permission to access and use them? Do you have to gather data on your own? Will gathering data require human subjects review? If you have to gather data on your own, how will you do so (surveys, interviews, what will be your sample…)?

VII.   Please discuss your initial thoughts about the kinds of caveats or limitations you will need to anticipate, given the sampling/measurement choices you are planning to make. If you need help understanding this question, please re-read the discussions about sampling/measurement limitations in *Approaches* (from PPA 205). This is an area that will evolve as you do your research, so you do not need to anticipate everything now.