

**PPA 500: CULMINATING EXPERIENCE**  
**SPRING 2024**

**Teaching Team**

Instructor: Dr. Amal Kumar, Ph.D. ([kumar@csus.edu](mailto:kumar@csus.edu))

Office hours: Mondays & Tuesdays 4:00-5:30pm, DTN 225

Or by appointment

General assistance: Sovannra Yos, PPA Department Coordinator ([yos@csus.edu](mailto:yos@csus.edu))

**Dates and Deadlines (see calendar below)**

<b>Sunday, January 28</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 1<sup>st</sup> group Zoom Meeting (5:30-7pm)</li><li>- To do: Schedule 1:1 meeting for week of February 5</li></ul>
<b>Sunday, February 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Outlines due to me by email</li></ul>
<b>Monday, February 5-Friday, February 9</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Registration for required OGS workshop opens (<a href="#">register here</a>)</li><li>- 1:1 meeting to discuss outlines</li></ul>
<b>Friday, February 23</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Email draft-in-progress by 5pm</li></ul>
<b>Sunday, February 25</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 2<sup>nd</sup> group Zoom meeting (5:30-7pm)</li></ul>
<b>Friday, March 17</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Email first full draft by 5pm</li><li>- Schedule 1:1 feedback meeting for March 25-29</li></ul>
<b>Monday, March 25-Friday, March 29</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 1:1 meeting to discuss first draft feedback</li></ul>
<b>Sunday, April 14</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Email second full draft by 5pm</li><li>- Schedule 1:1 meeting for April 22-26</li></ul>
<b>Monday, April 22-Friday, April 26</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 1:1 meeting to discuss first draft feedback</li></ul>
<b>Wednesday, May 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Submit full final draft + abstract to me + OGS by 5pm</li></ul>
<b>Saturday, May 11</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 3<sup>rd</sup> group Zoom meeting (5:30-7:30pm)</li><li>- Presentation run-throughs (i.e., full presentations prepared!)</li></ul>
<b>Tuesday, May 14</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Final project showcase + celebration</li></ul>

Zoom link: <https://csus.zoom.us/my/amalkumar>

**Note:** Please use the words “PPA 500” (without quotes) in the subject line of any email you send relating to your culminating experience. I have a special folder set up in my inbox to ensure that I do not miss your email and can respond promptly.

28-Jan-24	<b>Zoom #1</b>	1-Mar-24		1-Apr-24 (Mon)		1-May-24	<b>FINAL DRAFTS DUE</b>
29-Jan-24 (Mon)		2-Mar-24		2-Apr-24		2-May-24	
30-Jan-24		3-Mar-24		3-Apr-24		3-May-24	
31-Jan-24		4-Mar-24 (Mon)		4-Apr-24		4-May-24	
1-Feb-24		5-Mar-24		5-Apr-24		5-May-24	
2-Feb-24		6-Mar-24		6-Apr-24		6-May-24 (Mon)	
3-Feb-24		7-Mar-24		7-Apr-24		7-May-24	
4-Feb-24	<b>OUTLINES DUE</b>	8-Mar-24		8-Apr-24 (Mon)		8-May-24	
5-Feb-24 (Mon)	<i>1:1 meeting &amp; OGS registration</i>	9-Mar-24		9-Apr-24		9-May-24	
6-Feb-24		10-Mar-24		10-Apr-24		10-May-24	
7-Feb-24		11-Mar-24 (Mon)		11-Apr-24		11-May-24	<b>Zoom #3</b>
8-Feb-24		12-Mar-24		12-Apr-24		12-May-24	
9-Feb-24		13-Mar-24		13-Apr-24		13-May-24 (Mon)	
10-Feb-24		14-Mar-24		14-Apr-24		14-May-24	<b>PROJECT SHOWCASE</b>
11-Feb-24		15-Mar-24		15-Apr-24 (Mon)	<b>SECOND DRAFTS DUE</b>	15-May-24	
12-Feb-24 (Mon)		16-Mar-24		16-Apr-24			
13-Feb-24		17-Mar-24	<b>FIRST DRAFTS DUE</b>	17-Apr-24			
14-Feb-24		18-Mar-24 (Mon)		18-Apr-24			
15-Feb-24		19-Mar-24		19-Apr-24			
16-Feb-24		20-Mar-24		20-Apr-24			
17-Feb-24		21-Mar-24		21-Apr-24			
18-Feb-24		22-Mar-24		22-Apr-24 (Mon)	<i>1:1 meeting</i>		
19-Feb-24 (Mon)		23-Mar-24		23-Apr-24			
20-Feb-24		24-Mar-24		24-Apr-24			
21-Feb-24		25-Mar-24 (Mon)	<i>1:1 meeting</i>	25-Apr-24			
22-Feb-24		26-Mar-24		26-Apr-24			
23-Feb-24	<b>DRAFT-IN-PROGRESS DUE</b>	27-Mar-24		27-Apr-24			
24-Feb-24		28-Mar-24		28-Apr-24			
25-Feb-24	<b>Zoom #2</b>	29-Mar-24		29-Apr-24 (Mon)			
26-Feb-24 (Mon)		30-Mar-24		30-Apr-24			
27-Feb-24		31-Mar-24					
28-Feb-24							
29-Feb-24							

## Course Description

PPA 500 is your *culminating experience* in the MPPA program. It is, as Professor Wassmer says, not a rite of passage, nor a Herculean test of stamina. Instead, it is a way for you to demonstrate (to the faculty, to your peers, and most of all—to yourself!) your scholarly growth during your time in the program.

I hope that you will use your paper to reflect on and demonstrate a) what you can do now that you could not do before your graduate study; and b) what you are capable of contributing that distinguishes you in your work in policy and/or administration.

Formally, the culminating project has three closely related purposes:

1. **Integrate** concepts, theories, and frameworks from across the interdisciplinary MPPA curriculum, **synthesize**, them into a coherent whole, and **apply** those concepts to a real-world policy and/or administrative problem.
2. **Demonstrate learning objectives:** The MPPA program degree consists of achieving [19 learning objectives](#) across: (1) critical and integrative thinking, (2) practical application, and (3) professional role. Through your culminating project, you will demonstrate mastery of these objectives.
3. **Showcase your capabilities.** The culminating project showcase in May is an opportunity for you to publicly demonstrate this growth and learning, to be in community with your peers, colleagues, friends, and family, and to celebrate your completion of the MPPA program.

Because each of you have come into this program from different places, with different trajectories, goals, and interests, what this looks like in practice is going to be unique to each of you. Your culminating experience need not look like anyone else's culminating experience. We will work together over the course of the next few months to help you craft a project that is professionally impactful, personally meaningful, and completable within one semester.

There are three possible project types: a *Policy Report*, *Academic Paper*, and *Professional Portfolio*. Most students have typically written some form of a policy report; as a result, the department has put together the overview below with further background and guidance on this option. The timeline above also represents the general cadence of the semester for students choosing this option.

If you choose to write an academic paper or assemble a professional portfolio, please reach out as soon as possible, as these may require a different timeline with different submissions. It is your choice which you plan to do, and I will support and guide your work no matter which option you choose.

## **Grading**

This 'class' is not letter graded. There are only two possible outcomes at the end of the semester: Credit (CR) or No Credit (NC). CR means that you complete all elements of the culminating project to my satisfaction and present your work during the showcase. In rare cases, I may assign a grade of Report in Progress (RP) if your work requires minor edits beyond the end of the semester. This RP will be converted into a CR or NC once you submit your final draft to me.

If you receive a No Credit (NC) grade, you must retake PPA 500 to receive the MPPA degree. If you do not complete the culminating project a second time, you may have to reapply to the University and the Program to finish your culminating project and receive the degree.

The MPPA program has an excellent track record of our students completing their culminating projects on time. Although I am your primary advisor, all faculty members are available for guidance and consultation at any time during the semester. Please don't hesitate to reach out to anyone for support! Remember also that you are writing your projects *in community*—help each other out!

You should expect to finish your culminating project by the end of the spring semester and graduate from the program in May 2024. This is very doable, and you can do it!

## **The Policy Report Option**

### **Overview**

This document provides further guidelines for MPPA students opting to write a policy report for their culminating project, thereby clarifying expectations.

### **Background**

Beginning in the fall of 2020, PPA faculty moved from requiring students to complete a master's thesis for their culminating project. Instead, we started offering students a choice among three options to meet the culminating project requirement: 1) a policy report, like one that might be developed by the Legislative Analyst's Office or the like; 2) a draft academic journal article; or 3) a career-oriented portfolio. We intended to simplify the project requirement, making it easier for students to complete it in a single semester when taking PPA 500 (previously, it was common for students to finish a thesis over multiple semesters). We were also responding to student requests supporting projects that were more applied and closer to the type of work they might be conducting in their professional life.

We believe the change has worked well overall. Most students have completed their projects in a single semester, as desired. Student input has also been positive regarding the relevance of the work undertaken.

We have also observed that most students opt for the policy report option. That is fine with the faculty; we have commonly recommended that approach. Yet questions have arisen about what constitutes "data" for the policy report and how it relates to prior courses since we have strongly urged students to build on work in previous MPPA core classes. We respond to such questions in the present document.

### **Summary Of the Policy Report Option (taken in part from prior PPA documents)**

The policy report addresses an issue in public policy, public management, or both. It offers a concise summary, states why the topic is essential, uses one or more conceptual frameworks to structure its analysis, and gives evidence to make a compelling argument. One way of satisfying this is the form of "rational policy analysis" taught in PPA 220B, where you explore options or alternatives to address the issue and then use evidence to recommend a way forward. However, other analytic frameworks (e.g., those rooted in critical methods, historical methods, or organizational theory) are equally valid for use. The final report should be between 20 and 50 double-spaced pages, including graphics, tables, and references, with the length depending on the nature of the specific topic.

### **Further Guidelines**

- You must address an apparent, specific problem. We take this requirement very seriously. A general review of the affordable housing crisis is inappropriate for an MPPA culminating project report. An analysis of whether changes in accessory dwelling unit laws have desirable effects may be. We require that you state the policy or administrative problem in the first five pages of your project and highlight it in the executive summary you must submit to the Office of Graduate Studies.
- We expect students to build off ideas they have developed in other classes. Students who want to do something else should clear it with their advisor at least a month, preferably months, before starting the project and make a compelling case for why this is desirable.
- We expect your culminating project to go significantly beyond your prior work in another course. This is not a matter of simply recycling a previously submitted paper.
- We do not expect students to collect any new original (primary) data for the project. However, it may be desirable to supplement existing information with limited new primary data (e.g., from a few interviews with policymakers) and data (secondary) already gathered by others. For example, within a single semester, it generally is not feasible to develop and administer a survey and analyze the resulting data. Accordingly, you should not expect to do so.
  - However, it may be possible to draw from data previously used in another course (e.g., PPA 207) or complete a data collection effort designed in another course (e.g., PPA 205).
  - Or, you may use a data set gathered by another researcher, think tank, advocacy group, or government agency that is easily accessible and relevant to your master's project's underlying question. You may learn in PPA 205 or 207 of such data sets available from the Inter-University Consortium on Political and Social Research (ICPSR) or elsewhere
- Following the prior points, the heart of your analysis may consist of a literature review. Your contribution may be to go beyond what has been written to draw specific implications for the problem you are addressing.

- Your problem may be scaling up or transferring a policy solution that has worked elsewhere. For example, small county X may have tried a particular administrative approach, and the challenge before you may be how to transfer that to a larger, more complex county Y.
- You need to think about what "client" (e.g., a state or local agency, advocacy group, or the State Legislature) would be interested in your work and frame the final product accordingly. This may be a real person or group that has identified a particular project with whom you have been in contact. But it may also be a potential client that could reasonably be expected to be interested in your analysis.
- While this is not required, we encourage consideration of projects that might interest your worksite but you have not yet been able to undertake. We would be most pleased if your culminating project has practical benefits for you and your employer.

### **A Note About the Draft Academic Journal Articles and Portfolio Project Options**

Some of you may decide between doing a policy report or a draft academic journal article for your culminating project. Be aware that the expectations for each of these differ markedly. It would be best if you had a serious conversation with an academic advisor before choosing the scholarly journal option.

We also allow an option to compose a Portfolio in satisfaction of an MPPA master's project. Details on what is entailed in doing this are at the [PPA website](#). This option is also "out-of-the-ordinary," and again you should have a serious conversation with an academic advisor before you choose the latter option.

### **If You Have Questions...**

Talk to the faculty. We want to help you finish, become alums, and do great things. We do not want you to get to PPA 500 and say, "Hmm, maybe I should think about what I'm doing for a culminating project."