

PPA240A: PUBLIC MANAGEMENT & ADMINISTRATION I

M & W, 6-8:50 pm, DTN 108

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Office Hours: M & W 4:30-6 pm, DTN 230, or by appointment; if you would like to meet me outside of office hours, please email me at least 24 hours in advance.

Course Description and Learning Objectives

This course will help you understand fundamental concepts, foundational theories, and overarching themes in public administration. Through various cases, previous literature, technical reports, and in-class interactive activities, students will learn core public management principles, critically evaluate contemporary issues, and analyze them from multiple perspectives. The PPA240A and PPA240B sequence focuses on understanding and improving the function of public organizations and the employees within them. PPA 240A dives deep into human resource management and organizational behavior. You will apply these frameworks through active discussions, literature reviews, and group projects. (Note: PPA 240A and PPA 240B do not need to be taken in sequential order and can be completed in any sequence.)

PPA240A addresses five of [19 learning objectives](#) of our MPPA program. The following table shows the objectives applicable to PPA240A and how they are applied in this course.

PPA Learning Objectives	Applications to PPA240A
(1) c. Construct clear problem definitions with attention to client interests and varied stakeholder perspectives.	Work with group members on your mid-semester project, and independently for your final project, to construct clear problem definitions that account for client interests, operational challenges, and varied stakeholder perspectives in your group presentations and memos.
(1) h. Critically review literature to help understand and address a problem from various perspectives.	Critically read PA literature weekly and integrate academic research into your evidence-based memo to evaluate a problem from various perspectives.
(2) e. Write clearly and succinctly, as appropriate, for various audiences.	Practice writing clearly and succinctly in your reading reflections and your final memo.
(3) b. Understand obligations to advance public value consistent with the rule of law and an enduring search for reasonable and just action.	Understand public value through concepts like public service motivation, representation, and ethics. Work with group members on your mid-semester project to balance the rule of law with feasible solutions that advance social equity.
(3) c. Consider ethical dimensions of choices in public policy and administration.	Draw lessons from real-world cases involving administrative dilemmas, deliver ethical critiques during presentations, and discuss just decision-making with the class.

Class Format & Textbook

PPA 240A is a graduate-level seminar designed to engage students in critical discussion and collaborative learning. Each week, students will explore foundational concepts and theoretical frameworks through assigned readings, applying them to real-world cases and interactive group activities. There is no required textbook for this course. All reading materials will be accessible via CSUS library services or Google Scholar, and the weekly reading list will be posted on Canvas on the first day of class. No readings are required for the first session.

Course Schedule

This schedule will serve as a general plan of the class, not a rigid constraint throughout the semester. Based on students' learning pace and needs, we may spend more time on specific topics and less on others. Any changes to the syllabus or course schedule will be announced in advance.

Date	Topics
1. Aug 31/Sep 2	Course Overview & Introduction to PA
2. Sep 7/9	Bureaucratic Representation & Social Equity (no class on M)
3. Sep 14/16	Public Service Motivation & Recruitment
4. Sep 21/23	Work Engagement & Communication
5. Sep 28/30	Employee Turnover & Burnout
6. Oct 5/7	Organizational Structure & Culture
7. Oct 12/14	Organizational Goals, Resources, & Performance
8. Oct 19/21	Administrative Burden & Group Project
9. Oct 26/28	Citizen Participation, Collaborative Governance, & Coproduction
10. Nov 2/4	Street-Level Bureaucracy, Discretion & Coping
11. Nov 9/11	Bureaucratic Representation & Social Equity (no class on W)
12. Nov 16/18	Digitalization in the Public Sector & Behavioral Public Administration
13. Nov 23/25	Thanksgiving Week
14. Nov 30/Dec 2	Presentation & Discussion
15. Dec 7/9	Presentation & Discussion

Grading

- Class Attendance & Participation: 20%
- Weekly Reading & Discussion: 30%
- Group Project: 15%
- Individual Project: 35%

A 94-100% A- 90-93% B+ 87-89% B 84-86% B- 80-83% C+ 77-79% C 74-76% C- 70-73% D+: 67-69%
D 64-66% D- 60-63%

1. Class Attendance & Participation (20%)

We have a tremendous opportunity to learn from each other. Besides seat time, class participation is a key part of this graduate seminar class. This involves not only engaging in class discussions and in-class activities but also paying attention to what your classmates are saying. Please avoid using cell phones, laptops, or other electronic devices to browse non-course-related content or send messages. I expect a high level of courtesy and professionalism in the classroom.

During class conversations and group activities, feel free to discuss openly and interact actively. At the same time, respect others and avoid assumptions and generalizations. All students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, national origin, occupations, political affiliations, religion, sexual orientation, marriage, disability, or any identity category or background, are valued and equal members of this learning community.

Class Absence

Please email me in advance if you need to miss a class. Even if you cannot attend the class, you are still responsible for reading assigned materials, submitting weekly reading reflections, getting notes from your classmates, and meeting the deadlines already announced in the syllabus/first week. Missing three classes will result in a one-letter grade penalty.

2. Weekly Reading Reflection (30%)

Part 1: Reading Reflection (2pts each)

Weekly reading reflections are due by 11:59 PM the night before each class. This deadline is firm, so please plan accordingly. Starting in week 2 (week 3 for M section), you will complete the prompts below for each assigned reading and post them to the Canvas Discussion Board. (Note: Any tweaks or modifications to these prompts for specific weeks will be announced in advance.)

- a. Which specific argument or finding in this article do you find most convincing, and which do you find most vulnerable to criticism? Please include the relevant page numbers for each.
- b. Select one newly learned concept or theory from the article. Apply it to a real-world scenario, or your workplace/community context, explaining how it either validates or challenges a past professional or personal experience/common sense/intuition.
- c. Propose one provocative, polarizing, or thought-provoking question to drive our in-class conversation.

There is no strict word limit, but concise and thoughtful responses (e.g., roughly 3-4 sentences for questions like a and b) are typically sufficient. Evaluations are based on your depth of engagement, critical thinking, and authentic voice.

Part 2: Peer-Engagement (1pt each)

Prior to the start of class, read through your peers' submissions and leave at least **one substantive reply** to any single component (a, b, or c) of a classmate's post. Substantive replies should do more than simply agree; they should build on a classmate's point, offer an alternative perspective, present contrasting opinions, introduce supplemental context, or answer their posed discussion question. (I encourage you to take all of these approaches across the semester!)

3. Group Project: Administrative Burden, the Rule of Law, and Public Value (15%)

Public managers face a permanent governance dilemma. They must enforce strict regulations to ensure legal accountability, prevent fraud, and uphold the Rule of Law. However, the compliance, learning, and psychological costs embedded in these regulations often manifest as administrative burdens. These

burdens frequently exclude the most vulnerable citizens, violating principles of social equity and hindering the pursuit of reasonable and just action.

For this group project, each group will analyze a real-world public program or regulatory process in California through the lens of administrative burden. No written report is required for this project. Instead, each group will deliver a high-stakes professional briefing and defend your proposal live before the class.

- Presentation Structure:
 - a. Problem: Define the core problem by identifying how the current program/service or policy fails to deliver public value or creates a gap between intended goals and actual outcomes to the public.
 - b. Stakeholder Identification & Interests: Identify the key stakeholders (such as frontline workers, agency administrators, elected officials, and affected community members) and analyze their distinct roles and competing interests.
 - c. Burden Diagnosis: Identify and evaluate the specific learning, compliance, and/or psychological costs embedded in the program, explaining how these costs restrict citizen access, degrade the citizen experience, or deter engagement altogether.
 - d. Legal & Policy Mandate (Rule of Law): Explain the legal or institutional authority behind these requirements by citing relevant statutes, agency guidelines, or program regulations, and discuss their original accountability purpose. *(Note: you may use [California Legislative Information](#) for state-level statutes. If you are analyzing a local policy, you can search your target city or county's code via the [Municode Library](#).)*
 - e. The Ethical Critique (Just Action): Critically evaluate how those same rules create unjust exclusion and collide with equity.
 - f. The Balance Framework: Present an actionable, legally compliant solution (what a Balance Framework means: a reform strategy that modernizes administration—such as using automated data-sharing or smart ex-post auditing—to lower citizen burdens while strictly preserving legal and fiscal integrity).

While this is a collaborative group project, substantial disparities in contribution may result in adjusted individual scores. Detailed instructions and evaluation criteria will be provided via Canvas.

4. Individual Project: PA Theory into Evidence-Based Practice (35%)

The final project requires you to bridge academic public administration theory/concept with professional practice. Recognizing that real-world public and nonprofit workers rarely have time to read long-form academic papers, this project trains you to synthesize heavy research into high-impact, concise, practitioner-ready formats. To this end, you will complete two interconnected components focused on a specific public administration concept, theory, or managerial challenge relevant to California's public or nonprofit sectors:

Part 1: Prototype Presentation (10%)

Each student will deliver a prototype slide presentation of their work in progress to the class during the final two weeks of the semester. While Part 2 is your final written assignment, Part 1 is your live professional pitch. Your presentation must include:

- Your Professional "Why": A brief reflection explaining why you chose and focused on this specific topic, connecting it to your career trajectory, work experience, or research interests.
- Your Target Audience: Identify who your strategies are designed to help, and why

- The High-Stakes Challenge: Evidence-based background on the relevant California context and the urgent operational challenge they face. Please include data or specific examples from newspapers/policy reports highlighting impacts on specific or underrepresented communities.
- The Prototype Strategy: A walkthrough of your initial strategies (knowing they do not need to be perfect!), designed to test your ideas, highlight areas of uncertainty, and gather constructive feedback from your peers before writing your final memo.

Part 2: Evidence-Based Memo (25%)

Written in a professional letter or executive memo format addressed to your target audience, this assignment trains you to write concisely while maintaining academic rigor. Grounded in the feedback from your presentation, your formal submission provides the intellectual and practical foundation for your project, structured as follows:

- Introduction / Problem Context: Explain why this concept/theory matters to your target audience, to current CA administrative/organizational contexts, or to general/minority CA citizens.
- Literature Review: A targeted analysis of how this concept has been studied in the field of public administration.
- Translation into Practice: Clear, actionable takeaways showing how lessons from the literature translate into daily administrative work and managerial decision-making.

Detailed grading rubrics and source requirements will be announced separately on Canvas. (Memo Deadline: Due one week after your presentation date, by 11:59 PM on Canvas).

AI Use

PPA department policy on AI use allows each faculty member to decide what constitutes appropriate use. Students must know and follow the policy each faculty member sets for each class. In this course, students are welcome to use AI to assist with their writing, such as brainstorming ideas, proofreading, and/or checking grammar/typos. However, all initial writing must be original and produced by the student. Therefore, any of the following is considered inappropriate and will result in a one-letter grade penalty:

- Writing a draft that includes fake or hallucinated citations/information.
- Conducting a literature review without reading articles, but relying on AI's summaries

If you use AI, include a brief disclosure statement at the end of your assignment detailing the following:

- Tools used: Grammarly, ChatGPT
- Purpose: Brainstorming initial outline, checking for grammatical errors.
- Summarize how the AI's output influenced your draft/assignment.

Academic Honesty

Students should familiarize themselves with the University Honor Code and Academic Honesty Policy, particularly regarding *plagiarism*. The Student Code of Conduct defines academic misconduct, non-academic misconduct, and the consequences or penalties for each. Details are available at <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/student-conduct/academic-dishonesty.html>.

Instructor's Support and Email

Aside from office hours, I am willing to meet students concerned about any class activities, assignments/projects throughout the course. If you experience difficulties in this course, please do not hesitate to contact me. I welcome your feedback/suggestions and am happy to answer questions about course materials, class topics, and activities. Questions about this course or other assignments can be emailed to me. I try to reply to your email within 24 to 48 hours on weekdays. General academic support services are available at <https://catalog.csus.edu/academic-support-services/>.

Student Services Information and Links

[Services to Students with Disability \(SSWD\)](#)

“Sacramento State is committed to ensuring an accessible learning environment where the course or instructional content is usable by all students and faculty. If you believe that you require disability-related academic adjustments for this class, please immediately contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD) to discuss eligibility. A current accommodation letter from SSWD is required before any modifications, above and beyond what is otherwise available for all other students in this class, will be provided.”

[Student Health and Counseling Services](#)

“Your physical and mental health are important to your success as a college student. Student Health and Counseling Services (SHCS) in The WELL offers medical, counseling, and wellness services to help you get and stay healthy during your time at Sac State. SHCS offers Primary Care medical services, including sexual and reproductive healthcare, transgender care, and immunizations; urgent care for acute illness, injuries, and urgent counseling needs; pharmacy for prescriptions and over-the-counter products; mental health counseling, including individual sessions, group counseling, support groups, mindfulness training, and peer counseling; athletic training for sports injury rehabilitation; wellness services, including nutrition counseling, peer-led health education, and wellness workshops, and free safer sex supplies; violence and sexual assault support services. Most services are covered by the Health Services fee and available at no additional cost.”

[Crisis Assistance & Resource Education Support \(CARES\)](#)

“If you are experiencing challenges with food, housing, financial or other unique circumstances that are impacting your education, help is just a phone call or email away. The CARES office provides case management support for any enrolled student.

[Drop and Withdrawal Policy](#)

[Information Resources and Technology](#)

[Support Centers and Programs](#)

[Reading & Writing Center](#)