

Syllabus*

California State University, Sacramento Graduate Program in Public Policy and Administration

*this is a living document that will evolve as the term goes along.
Revised versions will be posted on SacCT and emailed to the class, with changes marked
in **yellow**
As of August 2015

PPA 200 **Introduction to Public Policy and Administration** Fall 2015

PROPOSED INTENSIVE WEEKEND:

Friday, August 28th 5pm – 9pm location ARC 1007
Saturday, August 29th 8am – 4pm location ARC 1007
Sunday August 30th 8am – 4pm location ARC 1007

Tuesdays beginning September 1st 6pm – 8:50pm location ARC 1007

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and by appointment

The best ways to reach me are to come to office hours on Tuesdays from 2:45pm-5:45pm at Tahoe 3040, to email me at venezia@csus.edu, or to schedule a time to meet with me outside of office hours. I prefer emails rather than phone calls.

Introduction

Welcome to the PPA department and to PPA 200! This course serves as an introduction to the foundations of public policy and administration—to the theories that guide our understanding of public policy making and analysis, and to how public organizations implement those policies in pursuit of the public good. We will begin with a broad review of democratic institutions and the roles of policy making and administration, covering the State of California in some detail. We then progress to a project that allows you to practice examining a policy area in detail and produce oral and written reports about the topic.

PPA 200 also serves as an introduction to graduate study at CSUS and in PPA. The course will orient you to reading, thinking and writing analytically and through different disciplinary lenses. The course is designed to immerse you in both content and skills to prepare you for later course work and for the thesis. Successful completion of this course, and of PPA 220A, is required before you progress to the balance of the program.

Course Objectives

Consistent with the overall plan for your Master's degree work, the objectives (knowledge and skills) of this course are as listed below. The expectation is not mastery per se, but beginning competency; there is likely wide variation in this class with regard to knowledge and skills in the areas listed below, so each person will have different strengths and weaknesses. You will continue to work on these objectives throughout the program. The objectives are that, during the course, you will begin to:

- Construct clear definitions of problems;
- Understand the difference between analysis and advocacy;
- Understand the significance of diversity in effective public governance in California;
- Consider the ethical dimensions of choices in public policy and administration;
- Work effectively in groups; and
- Write clearly and succinctly as appropriate to various audiences.

In addition, because this course is designated a writing intensive course, by the end of the semester, you will:

- Understand the major research and/or professional conventions, practices, and methods of inquiry of the discipline;
- Understand the major formats, genres, and styles of writing used in the discipline;
- Practice reading and writing within the discipline; and
- Practice reading and writing as a learning process that involves peer and instructor feedback, revision, critical reflection, and self-editing.

Format of Course and Expectations of students

This course is the introductory course in PPA. As graduate students, you will learn many theories and skills. There are few hard and firm rules in the practical application of public policy and administration, and you must rely on your own judgment to determine which theory or skill to apply to which problem (often after you have re-framed the problem). The goal of PPA 200 is to set you on a course to digest the materials you will learn in the coming two plus years. As a starting point for reading, please use the SQ4R technique at the back of this syllabus.

The course is taught in a seminar style. You are expected to come to class prepared to participate in conversations about the materials you have read. Study questions will be provided for some classes to give you a starting point for the class discussion.

In late August, we will begin our time together with a long weekend (August 28-30th) designed to immerse you in background knowledge and baseline skills. **This weekend is intensive and you will have work due in advance. Please review the entire syllabus**

now and plan accordingly. Plan to use the SQ4R method as you read. Since the intensive weekend front-loads quite a bit of class time, we will finish this course early—usually by mid-November. Understand that for those of you taking multiple courses, you may go to class for 6-8 days in a row for the first two weeks. Plan ahead by spreading preparation for all classes out over the month prior and anticipate that the first two weeks will be long.

I will never lecture for the entire class period; that is hard on all of us, and it will not help you engage in your learning. Rather, I will facilitate discussions and exercises designed to further your application of the learning. The readings will provide the foundation; most class time will be spent practicing applications of what we have read. My expectation is that you will have done it thoroughly enough to pull out main ideas. **I suggest coming to class with the main points of each reading with you.** If you have not done the reading, you will not be able to participate. Consistent lack of participation will result in a reduced class participation grade. Absences are not allowed for the intensive weekend and they are strongly discouraged for classes after that weekend.

I will make use of technologies available through SacCT (Blackboard) to do things such as make the course materials available online and send emails through that system. **This means that you will be expected to obtain and a Saclink account and check it regularly.** Most faculty use SacCT and My SacState to communicate with students -- it is your responsibility to check those locations regularly, even if you provided Suzi Byrd with an additional email. For information about getting connected to Saclink, please go to [UCCS](#). Once you have a Saclink account, you will be able to access your own courses through SacCT (these will usually be available one week before classes start and sometimes sooner).

While SacCT does not generally open until a week or so before classes start, PPA syllabi will be available by the first week in August and most instructors have reading assigned for the first day of class. Suzi will send an email to the listserv, but you should also check the PPA website.

Students are expected to complete all assignments in a complete and professional manner. I would like you to email me each of your out-of-class assignments. Complete and professional means double-spaced, **proofread**, well written, appropriately cited, and on time. **Please put your name in the file name (“Smith Assignment 1”), and make sure to put your name on the first page of your paper.** Anyone who does meet the writing expectations will be notified early on and strongly encouraged to seek assistance, possibly at the campus Writing Center. Papers needing additional work may be returned to be re-done at the discretion of the instructor for partial improvement of grades. A major goal of the first semester is to support you to make sure you can write at the appropriate level. If that does not happen, we may request that you take a writing course as an elective in the spring.

Getting help. It is important that you understand the material we are covering in class. The class is structured as a series of building blocks. You do not want to miss a foundational piece. If for any reason, you do not understand the readings, it is essential

that you gain clarity on the topic *during the time in which we are covering those topics*. You can speak up in class to ask for clarification or you can speak with me privately (via email, phone, in office hours, by appointment, or during class breaks). You are also welcome to seek help from your classmates. I am best reached via email, and I will do my best to return emails sent between Monday and Thursday within 24 hours.

Students with disabilities. Should you need assistance with portions of class due to disabilities, please let me know as soon as possible. The University offers services to student with disabilities and I would be glad to refer you to the appropriate campus unit.

Missing class. I expect students to attend all class sessions unless they have a compelling reason not to do so. You should notify me in advance if you need to miss a class. Except under very unusual circumstances, a student who misses three classes will be penalized one entire grade (e.g., an A- for the course will become a B-), and a student who misses more than three classes will receive a failing grade.

Late assignments. I will not accept late assignments (or allow for a make-up examination) unless a student experiences a highly unusual circumstance. At my discretion, a student who requests ahead of time to miss a deadline might be given a make-up assignment. Whether or not a penalty will be assessed depends on the reason (e.g., a family emergency constitutes a good reason; a competing requirement for another course does not). If there is not a compelling reason, late assignments will not be accepted.

Distractions. Please do not use cell phones or surf the web in class. If electronic devices are being abused in class, I may prohibit their use for all.

Academic Honesty. I take plagiarism and other acts of academic dishonesty very seriously. I reserve the right to fail students who are academically dishonest. Note that academic dishonesty can be grounds for dismissal from the university. Details are available at the University Policy Manual found at <http://www.csus.edu/umannual/student/UMA00150.htm>. If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism, it is your responsibility to educate yourself and/or come talk with me.

Assignments and Grading

As stated above, I will not accept late work. I understand that many of you are working full-time and attending classes nights and weekends. If you must miss class when an assignment is due, you will need to me it to me prior to class.

All papers should be sent by email (not through SacCT). Unless otherwise specified, homework is due by 6pm on the assigned day and must be time stamped as such (via email). Please use Microsoft Word for all assignments so that I can edit them electronically. Do not finish an assignment during the beginning of class, email me your paper, and then come to class late. If you do that, your paper will be docked one full grade (such as from an A to a B). **We will often use the papers in class, so please plan to have access to an electronic or paper copy.**

I grade as follows:

Papers and peer feedback	65%
Group presentation and paper	25%
Class participation (attendance/engagement in class discussion/activities)	10%
Total	100%

The PPA program uses the APA style (which is detailed in the Hacker style manual) for ALL papers and the thesis. Please familiarize yourself with this citation process quickly as it will be required for all papers.

Paper #1. Due August 24th by 6pm. Please email it to me at venezia@csus.edu

Identify a current public (governmental) problem that you are interested in and provide a decision maker (such as a state legislator or city council member) with a three-page (not including references) memo about the issue and possible options to deal with it. As appropriate, consider the ethical, economic, political, and organizational and policy dimensions of the issue. Help the reader understand the complexities of the issue as well as how the issue might be understood differently by different groups of interested people. In your analysis, be careful to distinguish between fact and opinion.

This paper will provide a baseline assessment of your writing and analytical skills. I will read your paper quickly and contact anyone who would benefit from having writing issues addressed quickly. This first paper is worth 5% of your grade and you may use it as a basis for work later in the term in PPA 220A.

Please do not call me for additional instructions; the assignment is purposely a bit vague in order to mimic the kinds of work people often need to complete at work, and to give you flexibility to determine how best to complete it. This paper will provide me with an initial sense of your writing skills, and about the decisions you make when synthesizing information. Few people do a perfect job on this; that is not the goal. Just do your best and know that this is a fairly low-stakes way for me to become familiar with your thinking and writing. We will use the papers to start thinking about policy-related writing and analysis. I will return the paper to you during the first week of class.

Paper #2 First draft due August 28th by 5pm and final paper due September 15th

You should do this paper only after you have read all the material for the intensive weekend class. The Baldassarre book identifies three underlying conditions that contributed to the Orange County bankruptcy. Beginning with those three conditions as a basis for your paper, think broadly about those conditions and, drawing on the contributions of Mathews/Paul, write a 6-8 page paper that addresses the question of whether any (or all) of the three conditions still apply to the State of California today. If so, which ones and why? If not, why not? Please be sensitive to the importance of transferring “lessons” from one context to another. In other words, do the lessons from a county-level experience transfer directly to the state level? Which changes must be made to make the lessons transfer? If you need a primer on the state’s fiscal condition, review the State Budget introductory pages or the Legislative Analyst’s budget discussions.

Bring a paper copy of your draft to class on the first night of the intensive weekend. We will work with the papers in class and the final paper will be due September 15th. This paper is worth 15% of your grade (based on your grade for the final draft).

Paper #3 Toolkit

You will turn in your “toolkit” in addition to a 5-6 page paper explaining the 4-5 in your toolkit, why they are important to you, and how you learned to use them. We will discuss this more as the semester progresses. Date to be determined at the start of the semester. This will be worth 10% of your grade.

Paper #4

I will provide information about this paper during the intensive weekend. This will be worth 20% of your grade.

Peer Feedback

In class, you will circulate drafts of your papers to classmates for feedback. You will review at least two papers and possibly four. I will grade your written feedback based on the extent to which it is thorough and beneficial for the author. Each feedback exercise will be worth up to 5% of your grade, depending upon the number of reviews I assign. The total for feedback will be 10% of your class grade.

Group project (30%)

I will distribute details about this during the first intensive weekend. This project will include an 18-25 page paper in addition to an oral presentation.

Editing papers:

Some students are quite comfortable editing their own work multiple times prior to submitting it and therefore turn in fairly polished work. For others, editing will be a new skill. In order to reinforce the notion of submitting finished, edited, work, I *may* return papers for re-writing and/or editing. Papers that require further editing will not receive credit until the required editing is complete.

Important note about formatting papers:

All papers should be typed, double spaced, and fall within the page limits specified. Please put a cover page on each assignment containing your name, your email, and the assignment title. Use 12 point font with one inch margins (top, bottom, left, and right). I expect correct punctuation, spelling and use of citations. If you are unfamiliar with APA style, consult the Hacker style guide.

The majority of your papers will be analytical, using the theories and concepts from class to illuminate a particular situation, and then requiring you to synthesize, analyze, and integrate your own thoughts/reflections. Written presentation is very important. You will often be called upon to communicate your analysis and recommendations quickly, clearly and concisely in work environments—and for different audiences. Please take this opportunity to practice and perfect your writing!

Required Texts

The books will be available in the bookstore or you can purchase them online. Just make sure you purchase the correct edition. Please bring the appropriate readings to class, since we will often use them in exercises. This includes articles you retrieve electronically (electronic readings are embedded in the syllabus portion of the schedule, not here). You do NOT have to bring in theses; you will skim several of those to become familiar with the different ways students approach the thesis requirement.

Baldassare, Mark. (1998). *When Government Fails: The Orange County Bankruptcy*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Bardach, Eugene. (2011). 4th Edition. *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: the Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*, Washington, DC: CQ Press.

California Legislative Analyst Office. (2014). Cal Facts. Available at: <http://www.lao.ca.gov/reports/2014/calfacts/calfacts-2014.pdf>.

Doyle, Michael and David Straus. 1993. *How to Make Meetings Work*. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Trade Press.

Hacker, Diane. (2011). *A Pocket Style Manual*. 6th Edition. Boston, MA: Bedford Books. (any version in the past 2-3 years will be sufficient, the basics do not change.)

Kingdon, John W. (1999). *America the Unusual*. New York, NY: Worth Publishers.

Mathews, Joe and Mark Paul. (2010). *California Crack Up: How Reform Broke the Golden State and How We Can Fix It*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Rainey, Hal. (2014). *Understanding and Managing Public Organizations* 5th Edition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass. (Please keep this text as it will be used in the 240 sequence as well.)

Tufte, Edward (2006). *Beautiful Evidence*. Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press. (About \$20 on ebay)

Wheelan, Charles. (2010). *Naked Economics*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Recommended for those who feel a bit uncomfortable with their knowledge of basic government systems is Kettl, Donald F. and James W. Fesler. (2005). *The Politics of the Administrative Process*. Washington, DC: CQ Press. 3rd Edition will be cheaper than the 4th and either will suffice.

NOTE: Hacker, Bardach, Rainey and Tufte will be used in other classes so please keep them! Wheelan is mandatory summer reading.

Course Outline and Schedule

As of May 2015

Articles marked with one asterisk (*) will be available on SacCT closer to the start of the term. You can also locate most of these online yourself.

Note that the background/summer reading for everyone is *Naked Economics* by Charles Wheelan. This is an easy and fun read—sort of a more sophisticated version of *Freakonomics*. We will not have time to cover it, but it will help you prepare for both PPA 200 and 220A.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Readings</u>	<u>Assignments</u>
<p>Friday Aug 28 5pm – 9pm</p> <p>Saturday Aug 29 8am – 5pm</p> <p>Sunday Aug 30 8am – 5pm</p> <p>Please do <u>all</u> the work for these three days in advance. We may not cover the items in the order listed.</p>	<p><u>Understanding the sectors for PPA</u> <u>Rainey, Chapter 3</u></p> <p><u>Institutional overview: American Government</u> Federalist Papers #10 and #51 available online at several sites including Yale’s Avalon Project (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/fed.asp)</p> <p>Kingdon, John. <i>America the Unusual</i>, all. <u>Study question</u>: What are the key ideas that make the US political system unique?</p> <p><u>State and Local Structure and context</u> Review the Cal Facts publication about California (most current version please – link listed in list above)</p> <p>LAO Report on Local Taxation</p> <p>Overview of Local Government Skim the Sturmfels thesis</p> <p><u>California State Political Context</u> Baldassare, all Mathews and Paul, all <u>Study Questions</u>: Do the three factors that were important in the Orange County bankruptcy still exist in CA? What are the key ideas that make the CA political system unique? How have these also made governance complex? Skim the Esquivel thesis</p> <p><u>Critical and Analytical Thinking</u> Bardach, all (but just skim the appendices) For a thesis using a version of the model suggested by Bardach skim the Dickinson thesis</p>	

	<p><u>Roots of PA: Political Science</u> *Lascher, Edward L. Jr. 1998. “Loss Imposition and Institutional Characteristics: Learning from Automobile Insurance Reform in North America” <i>Canadian Journal of Political Science</i>.</p> <p><u>Roots of PA: Organization Theory and Social Psychology; Bureaucracy</u> Rainey, Chapter 1, 2</p> <p>*Moore, Mark H. 2000. “Managing for Value: Organizational Strategy in For-Profit, Nonprofit, and Governmental Organizations. “ <i>Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly</i> 29:183.</p> <p><u>Study question</u>: What role do organizations play in the study of public policy and administration?</p> <p>Skim the theses by Foster and Fox</p> <p>ASPA Code of Ethics (available at http://www.aspanet.org, click on “About ASPA” and then click on “Code of Ethics” link)</p> <p>* McSwite, O.C., (2001) “Theory Competency for MPA-Educated Practitioners,” <i>Public Administration Review</i>, Vol. 61:1.</p>	
<p>Tuesday, September 1</p>	<p><u>Annual Welcome Back Pizza Party from 5:00-7:00 in Alumni Grove (class will begin at 7:15)</u></p> <p>“Circle back” to discuss highlights of readings from intensive weekend and answer questions from intensive weekend.</p> <p>Group exercises (to be handed out in class) – these will require you to utilize what you have learned from the readings you finished for the intensive weekend, so come prepared with your reading notes.</p> <p>PPA 2012 Self Study (Each CSUS academic department is reviewed every five to seven years by a faculty committee. The self study document is prepared by the Department to explain the academic discipline, outline student learning goals, explain the curriculum, etc.</p>	
<p>September 8</p>	<p><u>Writing for PPA</u></p> <p>“Betraying the College Dream,” Venezia, Kirst, Antonio, available at http://web.stanford.edu/group/bridgeproject/betrayingthecollegedream.pdf</p> <p>“On Balance...,” Kirlin and Shulock, available at http://www.csus.edu/edinsights/PDFs/R_On_Balance_07_12.pdf.</p>	

	<p>Stickiness graphic (to be handed out in class)</p> <p>Thesis form (to be handed out in class)</p> <p><u>Thinking about causation</u></p> <p>Readings TBD</p>	
September 15	Group project time	Final paper #2 due
September 22	<p><u>Creating, understanding and using narratives</u></p> <p><u>Collaboration</u> Doyle and Straus, <i>How to Make Meetings Work</i>. All</p>	First outline of group project due
September 29	<p><u>Making Effective Presentations</u> Tufte: read the Introduction and Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. Bring in at least two analytical reports you find interesting. They must include some visual presentation of information. <u>Possible Adobe workshop</u></p>	
October 6	No class... keep working on group projects.	
October 13	<p><u>Ethical Dimensions of PPA</u> * Walton, John R., James M. Stearns, and Charles T. Crespy, 1997. "Integrating Ethics into the Public Administration Curriculum: A three-step Process." <i>Journal of Policy Analysis and Management</i> 16. pp. 470-483.</p> <p><u>Study Questions</u>: Are public administrators held to a different or higher standard than private or non-profit administrators? Is this reasonable? Why or why not?</p>	Group project first drafts due
October 20	I will meet with individual groups in class.	Toolkits Due
October 27	<u>Group presentations</u>	
November 3	<u>Group Presentations -- Evaluations</u>	Group project papers due
November 10	No class	
November 17		Paper 4 due

Writing an Analytical Paper

The easier parts:

Use proper grammar, capitalization, punctuation, source citation, italics, etc.

Never use contractions in papers for this program or in professional writing.

Make sure you know the difference between a semi-colon and a colon.

Always read through your papers once for content and once for grammar before you turn them in. If Word is indicating that there is a grammar/space problem (when the red and green lines appear), pay attention and fix the problem.

Do not mix singular and plural in one sentence. For example, do not write, “The student should complete the paper so that they can receive a grade.” “The student” is singular and “they” is plural. This happens frequently when a writer is trying to avoid using she/he throughout a paper, so watch for it diligently!

Avoid passive voice whenever possible (“The table will be set.” “The paper will be graded.”).

Do not write that “someone feels” something when what you really mean is that someone “thinks” or “believes” something to be the case (“Students feel that there is too much homework.”)

Good paragraphs have the following components:

A topic sentence, usually at the beginning;

Supporting evidence; and

A transition to the next idea.

Do not use the royal “we” if you are the sole author (“We will next discuss…”).

Answer the question asked. If it has multiple parts that are not rhetorical, answer all of them.

Tell the readers what you are going to say. It is much easier to read analytical work if you know where the author is going. This is not a mystery novel.

Start at the beginning of the thought, not in the middle. (How much can you reasonably assume the reader knows? Who is audience and what is the purpose?)

Make statements that you can support with evidence as opposed to beliefs. Cite your evidence. Pick a method for citing references and use it consistently.

Every sentence should make or support a point—hopefully one that is connected to your overall argument.

Avoid long explanations of details that are irrelevant. This is probably not the time to dazzle someone with your specialized knowledge of a particular project.

Watch your choice of words. Both incorrect and unintended meanings can get you in trouble.

The harder parts:

Create a coherent framework for your papers—a line of thought and a structure that defines and answers the questions posed.

Use relevant literature (hopefully multiple authors) to ground your work.

Be analytical, not editorial or colloquial. This means that you will have to analyze and synthesize information, using a critical lens.

Use the right analytical framework and avoid confusing applications. Do not use a tool for analyzing policy and programs to analyze an organization. This is hard to learn, do it consciously... "what level of analysis is this tool designed for? Is that what I am applying it to?"

Take the time to edit your papers to make the writing crisp, the flow coherent and logical, and the document shorter and clearer.

Tips:

Think about the question(s) being asked for a few days.

Make an outline.

Write a draft. Edit it for content. Let it sit for a day (or at least a few hours). Edit it again for grammar.

Have someone proofread it.

Do a logic check (This is a topic sentence and it is supported by the following evidence. This is the analytical tool I am using because...)

SQ4R

Reading for Comprehension for Graduate Students

The SQ4R technique is designed to help you read for comprehension and understanding. The goal is not to read faster; it is to read more effectively the first time and retain the important concepts. SQ4R stands for:

Scan:

The first task is to scan the material you are about to read to determine the point of the piece. Review the title, the table of contents, the book jackets, the preface, introduction and conclusion if appropriate. Well-written books and articles *tell you what they are going to tell you*. As you scan, look for context, topic, main ideas, the author's(') perspective or bias, main arguments made, etc. Think about: how does this fit with other material you have read about this topic?

Questions:

What question(s) is this author trying to tell you? What question(s) is the author trying to answer? What should you know or understand better as a result of reading the piece?

Many books and most articles at the graduate level have a particular perspective. Textbooks, of course, are a bit different, since much of what is conveyed is factual information rather than a perspective or viewpoint. Some texts will contrast several theories. Articles and most books, however, are trying to address a particular question or theory, or convey an idea.

Write down any questions you have identified before you begin to read and then look for the answers to your questions.

The 4 R's:

Read: Once you have your questions identified, begin to do the reading. First, glance at the material. Is it organized into subsections that are logical? If it is, then it may make sense to scan them for content. Much of the reading assigned at this level has a main point and the author tells you what it is in an introduction or overview chapter. Skim the areas that make sense at first glance and read more in depth in the areas you did not understand as well. Look at graphs, charts and tables as sources of summary information as well.

Remember what your questions are. Read sections of material at a time, not the whole thing from beginning to end (unless it is short). As soon as you find yourself straying mentally, stop reading! Stretch, get up—do whatever you need to in order to get your focus back. Review where you left off to make sure you did not start to stray much earlier!

The zebra stripe problem...

“Highlighting” can confuse you more than help you. Wait until you have completed the reading and answered any questions you made before you highlight. At that point, you will know what the important points are and you can annotate them with your own

thoughts. Otherwise, you wind up with the dreaded zebra stripe... lots of yellow and white stripes with no real meaning.

Reflect: Think about what you just read. Can you answer your questions? A friend asks what you are reading. Can you say, "This chapter is about the way people behave in organizations; right now I am reading about how we motivate people," or would you need to say something very general (such as "I am reading about public affairs")?

Recite:

Saying things out loud can help you retain information. Tell someone the summary of what you just read, or say it to yourself out loud. Think of examples that help illustrate this point. Ideally, join a study group and share your questions and answers (after all of the people in the group have done their initial reading).

Review:

Review what you have written down. Is it in your own words? Does it make sense to you? Can you make sense of it three days later? What about three weeks later? Notes that do not mean anything to you, either from class or from readings, are not worth the time it took to write them down. If your notes do not make sense now, they never will. One hint about notes is to use your own words 99% of the time. Putting information into your own words can help you figure out if you understand the main point(s).

Sources:

Petrie, Trent A., Lisa Pinkenburg Landry, and Kimberly Bobinski Edwards. (1999). Achieving Academic Success, Ron Jon Publishing. Lecture notes from Dr. Ross Clayton and Dr. John Kirlin, University of Southern California (via Mary Kirlin).

Toolkits

What is a toolkit?

It is a compilation, in whatever form works for you, of those things that help you make sense of the world—the things that provide new perspectives, new insights, and allow you to understand the complex assortment of problems and questions that are raised in the public sector. Toolkits help you to look backward for understanding and forward to solve problems creatively.

Why do I need a toolkit?

If you are sitting in this class, you have some desire to learn, to get a better education, and perhaps to further your career goals. Sitting here one night a week will not make you a better manager or analyst, but finding ways to internalize what you learn in this program *will*. By internalizing, I mean making it part of how you think about the world. Bennis talks about how strong leaders force themselves to find time to reflect on what is going on in their lives—both in the past and projecting forward. Such leaders are seeking to identify lessons and look forward, with some thought, to what might be happening now. Your toolkit is a way of forcing reflection. When you come upon a problem you are not sure how to analyze or solve, look at your toolkit list while you ponder the problem.

What form can my toolkit take?

3x5 cards

A sheet of paper

A binder

A collage

The key to a toolkit is to have it visible frequently—someplace where you will use it—and start to incorporate it into the way you think every day, not just when you have the benefit of reflection.

What should be in my toolkit?

The most critical item about your tool kit is that it is yours. It is a list of tools that work for you. Your toolkit should contain the words and phrases and concepts that remind you of the bigger theme behind them. It should be brief, but meaningful.

For example, one of the items in a toolkit can simply be the word "incentives." Here is a story from a policy class at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government to illustrate this point. The professor was talking about a state in which roads were being torn up by cars and trucks. Policy wonks decided that it would be best to assess a fee to the vehicles that did the most damage. Naturally, trucks did the most damage, so the policy folks suggested that a fee per axle be levied against all trucks in the state. Makes sense right? Fine the people who do the damage. Well, if you charge a fee per axle, what is the incentive you create? For the truck drivers who want to reduce their costs, the incentive is to reduce the number of axles. As you reduce the number of axles, you increase the amount of weight per axle, further damaging the roads—the opposite of what the policy makers were trying to achieve.

"Incentive" logic can be applied to individuals as well. Understanding what motivates people can often help address workplace morale issues. Public organizations in particular seem to have trouble finding ways to reward effective employees monetarily. Eventually, it becomes clear that punching the clock and doing the minimum required gets you the same pay as going above and beyond the call of duty. So what is the incentive for an employee to work harder? What is the incentive for someone to continue to work there, to stay, or to work hard?

I also occasionally think about organizations when I see the word incentive. For example, what is it that drives this organization? Is it an organization that gets its revenues from charging fines to the people it regulates? If so, then what happens if the people being regulated disappear? Sometimes organizations have perverse incentives. For example, if the center I direct at Sac State were to fix all education problems, my colleagues and I would go out of business.

How can I use my toolkit?

Schon talks about being a reflective practitioner—that is, the people who are the most skilled are doing and thinking at the same time. Weick writes about this in his piece in the Executive Mind as well. Edward St. John discusses this as individuals framing, deconstructing, and then re-framing concepts. People learn something, take it apart so its pieces make sense to them, and then reconstruct it in a way that they can "carry around." This is the art of building a toolkit. An objective is to apply the information enough so that you internalize it and no longer need to put it on paper.