

Syllabus
California State University, Sacramento
Department of Public Policy and Administration

PPA 500, Thesis Seminar
Fall 2016

Tuesday 6-8:50 pm (only the Tuesday dates listed in the schedule below)
Sacramento State Downtown Center, 304 S Street (*tentative*; depends on readiness)

Su Jin Jez
(916) 278-5955 (office)
(415) 786-8846 (cell)
jez@csus.edu

Office: Tahoe Hall 3035
Office hours: Tues., 3-5,
before class *at the Downtown*
Center (specific office TBA)
and by appointment

Ted Lascher
(916) 278-4864 (office)
(530) 400-5688 (cell)
tedl@csus.edu

Office: Tahoe Hall 3039
Office hours: Mon., 4-6,
and Thurs.
5-6 *at Center for*
Collaborative
Policy and by appointment

Introduction and Course Objectives

The sole goal of this course is to help students complete their theses by the deadline of **December 2, 2016 at 3:00 pm.**

To that end, the course provides faculty and peer guidance in preparation of material to satisfy the Master's thesis requirement. This includes clarification of general program expectations and appropriate deadlines, support in completion of theses, and provision of basic support in a structured environment of feedback.

Format of Course and Expectations of Students

Each class session will include interactive sessions involving students reporting on progress and problem solving with peer feedback and consultation. As instructor of record, we will provide general guidance and support, but your primary obligation is to your thesis readers.

The class will meet four times during the term to help keep each student on track and provide assistance as necessary. You are expected to come prepared to discuss your own work and to support others as appropriate.

There are University-wide thesis writing groups that you can also join.

Prerequisite:

To enroll in this course you must have completed all but one of the courses in the Public Policy and Administration Program (i.e., PPA 200, 205, 207, 210, 220A, 220B, 230, 240A and 240B plus two electives) with at least a B- in each course and an overall average of 3.0 or better. You must also have advanced to candidacy. Accordingly, students cannot enroll in PPA 500 until their last semester of course work and are no longer allowed to take more than one course (other than an internship course) in addition to PPA 500. It is also necessary to have advanced to candidacy before enrolling in PPA 500. The department chair (currently Ted Lascher) is authorized to modify these restrictions (except the advancement to candidacy mandate, which is a University requirement) in exceptional circumstances.

Primary and Secondary Advisors:

We expect that you will arrive the first day of class with your thesis question, readers identified, and your pre-thesis form (attached). We have also found that students who do not have the first two chapters of their thesis drafted by the first day of class are unlikely to finish that semester.

While we aim to match you with thesis readers who best meet the needs of your particular project, we also intend to share the workload as equitably as possible among PPA professors. For that reason it is essential that you secure the permission of your desired advisors early. If a primary advisor already has a disproportionate share of thesis supervision he or she can suggest another PPA professor that you should contact.

Each thesis requires a secondary reader as well as a primary advisor. Preferences about reading differ for second readers and different “pairs” of readers work differently. Some second readers are actively involved throughout the project, others prefer to provide input after individual chapters are completed and approved by the primary advisor, and still others prefer to review a complete draft. Individual arrangements should be made with your secondary advisor on the specific amount of contact to occur during the semester. Remember that both your primary and secondary advisors must sign off on your final product. It is essential that at minimum they be both be “kept in the loop” throughout the semester.

All students are required by the first (preferred) or second (mandatory) meeting to have developed a thesis question and named primary and secondary advisors who have agreed to supervise and assist in the completion of the assignments required for this class. Understand that this is the bare minimum for beginning the seminar. A form for this purpose, which should be provided to Professor Lascher, is included at the end of this syllabus.

Only active, full-time PPA faculty members may serve as primary thesis advisors. For fall 2016 this group includes Professors Gossett, Jez, Lascher, Venezia, and Wassmer. A secondary advisor can be chosen from among this same group. Additionally, students may include as a secondary reader part-time instructors in PPA, faculty from other departments, and retired PPA faculty—in short, there is much more flexibility with respect to second readers. Please consult with one of your course instructors before approaching someone other than a full-time PPA faculty member to serve as a second reader

You will need to stay on schedule; if you slip, your readers may be unable to provide you feedback in sufficient time to meet the thesis deadline.

Research Partner: Each PPA 500 student will be paired with another who is registered in this class. This person will serve as a partner in their quest to finish the thesis. Besides their primary and secondary advisors, this partner will serve as a sounding board, confidant, and a third set of eyes to read what is written. This is meant to be a reciprocal relationship where your help will be equally rewarded by the help of another. Please secure this person's signature also on the sheet attached to syllabus.

Editors: Unless he or she has advised you otherwise, your primary thesis reader is not the copyeditor of your thesis. He or she is there to help you with developing and focusing your research question, assisting with locating appropriate literature resources, addressing broad questions of organization and sequence, reviewing methodology, and ensuring that you maintain focus on the key issues and that you end up with a high quality thesis. Thesis advisors are not there to catch spelling and grammar errors (although they may point them out if they see them). If you seem to be having substantial writing issues of this sort, your adviser may recommend that you turn to a classmate or that you hire a professional copyeditor to assist you with this aspect of your thesis.

Format of Class Meetings: This course will meet from 6:00 to no later than 8:50 p.m. on five nights throughout the semester.

This is neither a lecture-based course nor a traditional seminar; it is a workshop type course. All students are required to participate in class discussions and should come prepared to class each week with a summary of progress in the previous week(s), and questions/concerns that need to be addressed. Expect to be called on often to make such a report. There may be some brief readings assigned that are designed to address common obstacles and strategies for overcoming them. We may also be joined by students who are "sitting in" a term ahead of completion and those who completed 500 but who have not yet finished their thesis.

Assignments and Grading

There are only two grades that can be obtained in this class: reasonable progress (RP) or no credit (NC).

We will assign you the RP grade if:

- 1) You complete your thesis during the semester (Graduate Studies will convert the RP grade to “credit” after approving the final thesis); or
- 2) You have completed multiple chapters of your thesis and, in the judgment of your primary advisor, are likely to complete the entire thesis during the early part of next year (we will consult with your primary advisor about the status of your thesis if you have not completed it).

We will assign you a “NC” grade if you have not completed your thesis and are unlikely to do so in the near future. You may take PPA 500 one more time if you receive a “NC” grade. If you do not “pass” the course a second time there will be consequences for your ability to remain in the MPPA program.

Reading Material

(1) *CSUS Guide For Thesis Format*, Latest Edition, Office of Research and Graduate Studies, CSUS, available free on web at <http://www.csus.edu/gradstudies/CurrentStudents/Thesis-Project-Dissertation/FormattingWorkshops.html> . This site changes near the beginning of the term so please check back regularly.

(2) *A Pocket Style Manual, 7th Edition*, 2014, Diana Hacker Bedford Books; available for purchase at bookstore or online. [Click here to buy from Amazon.](#) (Most PPA students have already purchased this manual for an earlier class.)

(3) -Recommended – *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article: Second Edition*, 2007, Howard S. Becker, Chicago Press. [Click here to buy from Amazon.](#)

(4) Recommended – *How to Write a Thesis*. 2015, Umberto Eco, MIT Press. [Click here to buy from Amazon.](#)

Schedule:

Note that while specific assignments are listed throughout the semester, beyond the first two assignments, the order and number may be modified with the consent of your primary thesis advisor. In particular, students who complete a more traditional hypothesis driven thesis are usually “done” with each chapter as it is signed off. Other students will have good working drafts that may still require modifying previously “approved” chapters as they move along.

The agreed upon schedule is to be turned in at the second meeting (an example of such a schedule is given in the appendix). We recognize that particular students may have needs that are best met by modifying the general pattern set forth for completion of the master’s project.

Prior to meeting

Due on September 2 via email: draft of first two chapters of thesis (best) or completed pre-thesis form (see end of syllabus). .

Session 1 – September 6, 2016

Due on September 6 in class:

(1) Prepare a 5-10 minute oral presentation about your thesis, using information provided in your pre-thesis form as a guide.

(2) *Approved Thesis Question, Advisors' and Research Partner's Signatures Sheet (see end of syllabus). Approvals can be gathered electronically (no signature needed), simply turn in a paper copy with email approval printed so we have a complete record.*

Class activities and objectives:

- Student pre-thesis presentations
- Overview of traditional chapter formats for thesis
- Strategies for success in research and writing
- Review of APA format and expectations
- Review of Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements
- Discussion of writing expectations for a typical introductory thesis chapter (some students may begin with another chapter, which may be acceptable depending on the expectations of the thesis advisor)

Session 2 – September 20 Due on September 20 in class: schedule to completion approved by first and second readers

Class activities and objectives:

- Specific content for this class dependent on needs we identify for particular students after reviewing initial assignments
- Discussion of writing expectations for typical literature review and methods chapters

Session 3 – October 25

Class activities and objectives:

- Further discussion of issues related to specific student projects
- Discussion of writing expectations for typical findings and concluding chapters

Note: The final chapter of the thesis is one of the most important parts of your thesis and one of the most difficult to write. As such, we dedicate much of this class to grappling with

what a successful concluding chapter looks like and how to move from a statement of findings to drawing conclusions and making recommendations.

Session 4 - November 8

Class activities and objectives:

- Further discussion of expectations for last chapters
- Consideration of remaining roadblocks to thesis completion

Session 5 - November 15

Class activities and objectives:

- Discussion of expectations for abstract, front material, and tables/figures
- Possibilities for publishing from your thesis research

Thesis Schedule

	Strongly encouraged deadline	Department requirement	University requirement	Check off when completed
Advancement to candidacy			X	<u>Before</u> registration for PPA 500
Thesis question with signature of primary and secondary advisor and research partner		September 6		
Graduation application turned in			October 1	
University Formatting Workshop (see http://www.csus.edu/gradstudies/currentstudents/thesis-project-dissertation/formattingworkshops.html)			October 27	
Grad Studies Format evaluation signoff * By appointment ONLY as specified on Grad Studies webpage: http://www.csus.edu/gradstudies/CurrentStudents/Thesis-Project-Dissertation/Submission-and-Deadlines.html			X Recommend no later than November 23	
Final copy to Grad Studies office	December 2, 3pm		X	

***This is likely to be a two step turn in process. We will discuss in class. In addition, these dates are not yet finalized.**

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, help you think about a second reader who might fill in certain knowledge and skills the first reader might not have, and make sure that you are on track to complete a high quality thesis. 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 so that there will be fewer surprises once you start writing, and so that you will produce an excellent thesis.*** 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: <http://www.csus.edu/ppa/thesis-project/bank/>). You will notice quite a bit of variation across theses.

1. 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 to Social Research* from PPA 205 and re-read the information presented about research questions. You can use this space to test out a few ideas.
2. Why do you think this topic is important (for policy, practice, etc.)?
3. 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.)
4. 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?
5. 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 (your introduction), and perhaps the inter-relatedness, of your variables, issues, or criteria. Some topics/questions have been extensively researched and you are 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.***

6. 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 methodolog(y/ies) are you planning to use? Begin to think about how you will use your own thoughts and voice to make sense of what you learn. In your answer, please clearly discuss how you will operationalize/measure your variables, issues, or criteria discussed in IV above. Make sure your proposed methodolog(y/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 methodolog(y/ies), not the reverse.
7. Where will your data come from? Does the relevant information exist already? Can you get permission to use it? Do you have to create it yourself (e.g., by conducting a survey)? Will it require human subjects review?
8. 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. This is an area that will evolve as you do your research, so you do not need to anticipate everything now.

Suggested Five Chapter Outline for Traditional PPA Thesis

Below is one way to think about the organization of Master's project in a traditional five chapter format. You should work out the specific format of your thesis with your principal advisor.

Chapter 1: Introduction

What is the question you are investigating? In theory and application, why is this question important? Relate the topic to the public policy and/or administrative material you have learned in this program, cite general interest publications that raise the importance of this topic. Describe how the rest of your thesis/project will flow.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

What is already known about this issue? Review a select sample of academic literature, existing reports, and/or policy/administrative history of this issue. Reference the material you have been exposed to in the program. Conclude with a summary of what gaps in our understanding/knowledge of the topic your research will fill. Identify the specific variables involved in your study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

What is the method you will use to gather the facts to answer your research question? Include data collection and data analysis methods. Be specific and detailed.

Chapter 4: Results/Findings

Present your findings with an analysis.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

Summarize how you approached the research topic and what you found, with an emphasis on the most important conclusions that relate directly to your research question. Consider also the limitations of your work and how future researchers might address them. Most, important, answer the “so what?” question: that is, what implications does your study have for public policy or public management?

Suggested Outline for PPA “Project” thesis

A project thesis may look different than a traditional thesis. The information below is designed to give you an idea what probably needs to be included. Your particular project may have additional sections or chapters; it will depend on what your audience needs to know. You should work out the specific format of your thesis with your principal advisor.

Chapter 1: Introduction

What is this project trying to address? What is the genesis of the project? Who is the audience? What issue(s) are you investigating? Most project oriented theses have a clear practical application, what is it? And how will you be using more traditional theory and research to help inform the issue? Relate the topic to the public policy and/or administrative material you have learned in this program, cite general interest publications that raise the importance of this topic. Describe how the rest of your thesis/project will flow.

Chapter 2: What do we know and what am I adding – a somewhat modified literature review and methodology section

What is driving the need for this project, what background information is important? What is already known about this issue? Review existing reports, and/or policy/administrative/political history of this issue. As you talk about how you’re going to tackle the issue (your approach or methodology) you will likely be including some “theory” or framework. Make sure you talk about this literature as well. Reference the material you have been exposed to in the program as appropriate.

What is the method you will use to gather the facts to answer your research question? Include any data collection and data analysis methods. Be specific and detailed.

Chapter 3: Results/Analysis/Your Work

Describe your work. What did you discover? Present your findings with an analysis. Remember to show your information/findings in multiple formats, “pictures, words and numbers”. Try to make your findings a delight to read.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and Implications

Summarize what you have done in each of the previous chapters and then draw conclusions. What does your analysis say? What are the recommendations and/or implications of what you found? What surprised you? What could you not find? What else needs to be done by practitioners and researchers to help address this issue? Make

sure you return to the big questions you raised at the beginning about why the issue needed to be addressed.

Suggested Six Section Outline for Thesis Based On Traditional Public Policy Analysis

Below is another way to think about the organization of Master's project in a six-section format. You should work out the specific format of your thesis with your principal advisor.

Section 1: Define the Problem

- I. Specific problem
- II. Larger context and background
- III. Others' experiences
- IV. Literature review

Section 2: Environment

- I. Political environment and constraints
- II. Legal mandates and issues
- III. Economic factors
- IV. Social issues

Section 3: Alternatives

- I. Analyze causes of problem
- II. Define the variables inherent in alternatives
- III. Reduce and simplify number of alternatives

Section 4: Criteria

- I. Select and justify criteria for evaluating alternatives (e.g. cost/benefit, equity, political feasibility, accountability)
- II. Relative weighting of criteria
- III. Methodology

Section 5: Analysis of Alternatives

- I. Project outcomes of all alternatives
- II. Analyze outcomes in terms of criteria
- III. Summarize and contrast alternatives
- IV. Confront the trade-offs

Section 6: Recommendation and Conclusions

- I. Tailor recommendation to proper audience/clients
- II. Long-term versus short-term issues

III. Pay attention to implementation

PPA 500

Thesis Question, and Advisors' and Research Partner's Signatures

Student's Name: _____

Thesis Question:

Primary Advisor's Signature: _____
(may be accompanying e-mail)

Secondary Advisor's Signature: _____
(may be accompanying e-mail)

Research Partner's Signature: _____
(may be accompanying e-mail)