

PPA 500 Syllabus  
Fall 2018

Master's Program in Public Policy and Administration  
Master's Program in Urban Land Development

Sacramento State

**Professors:** Rob Wassmer, Su Jin Jez, Ted Lascher, and Andrea Venezia

**Office Hours:** Check with each individual instructor as to where it is best to meet with them if you wish to discuss something in person. Your main contact for thesis-related questions is your primary advisor.

**Meeting Dates and Times:**

Tuesday, August 28, 7 – 9 pm (with Professor Wassmer following PPA Pizza Picnic)  
Tuesday, September 11, 6 – 8 pm (with Professor Jez)  
Tuesday, October 9, 6 – 8 pm (with Professor Venezia)  
Tuesday, November 6, 6 – 8 pm (with Professor Lascher)

**Meeting Location:** Sac State Downtown Building (Third and S Street), Room 108

**Required Material:**

(1) *CSUS Guide For Thesis Format*, available free on web at <http://www.csus.edu/gradstudies/CurrentStudents/Thesis-Project-Dissertation/Templates-and-Guides.html>;

(2) *A Pocket Style Manual*, Diana Hacker, Bedford Books; available for purchase at [Amazon.Com](http://Amazon.Com); PPA students should have already purchased this for an earlier class;

(3) *Writing Literature Reviews: A Guide for Students of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Jose Galvin, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition or later, Pycszak Publishing; available for purchase at [Amazon.Com](http://Amazon.Com); PPA students should have already purchased this for an earlier class.

**Course Objective:**

The goal of PPA 500 is to help students complete their thesis by **November 30, 2018**; or make "reasonable progress" so that they can complete it the following semester. Details on how to sign up for your required thesis format review at the Office of Graduate Studies is at <http://www.csus.edu/gradstudies/CurrentStudents/Thesis-Project-Dissertation/Submission-and-Deadlines.html>. You should sign up for this appointment as soon as you are confident that you will finish your entire thesis in the fall of 2018. If you will not finish this semester, then this appointment is unnecessary.

This 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 your thesis, and provision of basic support in a structured environment of feedback.

**To receive reasonable progress in this class, you will need to satisfy what your primary advisor deems as necessary to do this. Please clarify this with her/him at the start of the semester in the form of an email exchange. (Usually this is set this as three completed thesis chapters). You will also need to attend, and complete assignments, for all four meeting dates.**

### **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. We will provide general guidance and support, but your primary obligation is to your primary and secondary advisors.

We will meet four times throughout the semester to keep each other on track and help as necessary. You must come prepared to discuss your own work and to support the work of others. An assignment is due each meeting.

### **Prerequisites:**

To enroll in PPA 500, you must have completed all but one of your core courses in the Public Policy and Administration Program (PPA 200, 205, 207, 210, 220A, 220B, 230, 240A, 240B) plus one elective, with at least a B in each course and an average grade of B or better in all. (Or the equivalent for a MSULD student). Accordingly, students cannot enroll in PPA 500 until their last semester of course work and in no more than two courses along with PPA 500. (Though we recommend that you only take one or zero additional courses in the semester enrolled in PPA 500.) It is also necessary to have advanced to candidacy before enrolling in PPA 500. Only the PPA Chairperson can modify these restrictions (except the advancement to candidacy mandate, which is a University requirement), and this will only occur in exceptional circumstances.

### **Primary and Secondary Advisors:**

Before the first meeting of PPA 500, all students must have developed a thesis question and named their primary advisor who has agreed to supervise and assist in the completion of their thesis. (See Appendix I and II.)

We intend to have primary advisor roles divided up equally among PPA professors and thus it is essential that you secure the permission of your desired primary advisor early. If a primary advisor already has their share of thesis supervision, they will suggest another PPA professor that you should contact.

Preferences about reading differ for secondary advisors, and different pairs of primary and secondary readers work differently. Some like to see each piece, others prefer to see a complete draft. Check first with your primary advisor as to how they would like the editing process to occur regarding them and your secondary reader. Though remember that both your primary and secondary advisors must sign off on your final product. It is essential that they be both be "kept in the loop" throughout the semester.

You may choose your primary advisor from Professors Jez, Lascher, Venezia, and Wassmer. A secondary advisor comes from this same group, or part-time PPA Instructors, or other part and full-time professors and instructors at Sacramento State. In some cases, you may work with retired PPA faculty. Since this is Professor McClellan's first semester with us, she will only serve as a secondary advisor.

You will need to stay on schedule and we suggest you develop such a schedule in an email correspondence with your primary advisor early in the semester. Faculty will work to return the items in timely fashion, but that is first dependent on you keeping to your agreed upon schedule.

### **Research Partner:**

At our first meeting, you will pair with another student registered in this class. This person will serve as your partner in a quest to finish the thesis. This partner can serve as a sounding board, confidant, and a third set of eyes to read your drafts. This is a reciprocal relationship where your help gains the help of another.

### **Format of Class Meetings:**

This course will meet from 6:00 pm to no later than 8:00 p.m. on four nights throughout the semester. (With the exception of the first meeting on August 28 that meets from 7 to 9 pm due to PPA Pizza Picnic.) This is not a lecture-based course. All students participate in discussions and should come prepared to class each week having completed the specific assignment and have formulated a summary of their progress in the previous weeks, and questions/concerns to address. Expect to make such a report. **Students who intend to enroll in PPA 500 in the spring of 2019 should attend the first meeting of fall 2018 to familiarize themselves with the thesis process and know the requirements for a successful completion in the spring.**

### **Assignments and Grading:**

There are only two grades for this class: Reasonable Progress (RP) or No Credit (NC). Professor Wassmer (as the instructor of record) will ask your primary advisor what you have earned and assign that grade.

Reasonable Progress means that you either finished your thesis this semester or are capable of finishing in the next semester. The standard by which to judge the second qualification is to be determined between you and your primary advisor, and usually involves a minimum number of completed chapters. Please talk to your primary advisor to find out what his/her expectation is. When you complete your thesis, and turn into the University, the RP grade converts to Credit on your transcript for PPA 500.

If you do not receive a passing grade in 500, you may take it one more time. If you do not pass the course a second time, you receive a dismissal from the University and must reapply to finish. Given the constraints on admissions, this would require you to compete directly with incoming students for a seat. We will not look favorably on these petitions. Please expect to finish the thesis the semester you take PPA 500, or at the latest, the semester after.

## Schedule:

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### Prior to First Meeting

**Minimum** before August 21, 2018:

(1) send completed electronic copy of "PPA 500: Thesis Question and Advisors' Names" (given in Appendix I) to [rwassme@csus.edu](mailto:rwassme@csus.edu) and your primary advisor;

(2) send electronic copy of prospectus/memo defining your problem and explaining why it is important, and the general scope of issue (see Appendix II for questions to consider when completing this) to [rwassme@csus.edu](mailto:rwassme@csus.edu) and your primary advisor.

**Necessary (if you wish to finish thesis in fall 2018)** before August 21, 2018:

(3) complete drafts of Chapters 1 or 2 of your thesis and send to [rwassme@csus.edu](mailto:rwassme@csus.edu) and your primary advisor.

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### Session 1 – August 28 – Professor Wassmer

Background and Goals

Process

Human Subjects Approval

Advice to Students Enrolled in PPA 500 Next Semester

Assignment Due: Bring 10, double-spaced, paper copies of your two-page prospectus/memo (which was due before meeting) defining your problem and explaining why it is important and the general scope of issue to be handed out to all PPA 500 participants. Each of you will offer a five to 10-minute presentation/discussion on their thesis topic to the entire class. In this presentation, be sure to raise issues/concerns that you have encountered in your drafting of the first two chapters of your thesis (or at a minimum your prospectus). While listening to another presentation, think of at least one comment and write it down on the handout they gave to you. We will do this together for the first presentation.

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### Session 2 – September 11 – Professor Jez

Assignment Due: Bring 10 paper copies of the outline you have worked out for the rest of your thesis with your primary advisor that includes specific dates when remaining chapters (or other achievement points) completed so at least three chapters done in early December 2018. If possible, this should be for the entire thesis. Be ready to make a five to 10-minute presentation on

this to entire class. Also, raise concerns/setbacks/snafus you have encountered in the thesis process.

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### **Session 3 – October 9 – Professor Venezia**

Assignment Due: Be prepared to give the class a five to 10-minute presentation that covers the following: your research questions, the factors/variables you are studying, what you expect to learn, what the literature told you, and the methodology that you are using in your thesis. Pay attention to weaving those issues together to tell a compelling narrative and be sure to tell us why someone should care about what you are doing/learning. Bring 10 paper copies of a handout that will help the rest of us understand your work (you could create a visual/use a visual from your thesis or use text). Use this as an opportunity to seek feedback on questions/concerns that you may have. While listening to each presentation, you should think of at least one comment and write it down on your peer's hand-out. We will have a brief discussion with feedback for the presenter after each presentation.

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### **Session 4 – November 5 – Professor Lascher**

As a class, we will review the University thesis formatting requirements. The University now requires that students take a formatting course (done by attending this session) or complete the online class. If you do this in online class, you get a signoff sheet at the end that you need to bring when you have your thesis format meeting. This session will discuss final logistics for turning the thesis in and graduation.

Assignment Due: Be prepared to give the class a five to 10-minute presentation on the progress you are making on your thesis. Use this as an opportunity to seek feedback on questions/concerns that you may have.

Appendix I: Thesis Research Question and Advisors' Names

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

One-Sentence Thesis Research Question (think Bardach Step One):

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Primary Advisor's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Proposed Secondary Advisor's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Research Partner's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix II: Prospectus Requirements

Use these questions to 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. The purpose of these questions is to start/continue conversations with faculty members to help you find a first reader, 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 entire narrative.

Your advisor(s) might ask you to revise your answers to these questions multiple times to help you prepare for PPA 500. ***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 the chapters. Feel free to read through theses in PPA's thesis bank to help you understand the expectations (<http://www.csus.edu/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 200, 205, and 220A and re-read the information presented about research questions.
- II. Who is your ideal audience?
- III. Why do you think this topic is important (for policy, practice, etc.)?
- IV. 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.)
- V. What kinds of variables, issues, or criteria will you need to analyze/discuss to answer your research question(s)? Why are those the most important ones?
- VI. What kinds of literature will you plan to read to prepare to write your thesis? 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 are 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.***
- VII. 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, 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 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? Does it 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 must gather data on your own, how will you do so (surveys, interviews, what will be your sample...)?

- VIII. 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.



### **Appendix III: Suggested Five Chapter Outline for Traditional PPA Thesis**

Below is one way to think about the organization of master's thesis in a traditional six-section format. You should work out the specific format of your thesis with your principal advisor. Ten to 12 pages would be the suggested lengths for each section.

#### **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 do we know about this issue? Review a select sample of academic literature, existing reports, and/or policy/administrative history of this issue. Reference the relevant material learned in PPA 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**

Present your findings with an analysis. Save the major findings and conclusions for Chapter 5.

#### **Chapter 5: 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 answers you have derived to your research questions? What surprised you? What could you not find? Offer any suggestions on how to do this differently.

## **Appendix IV: Suggested Outline for PPA “Project” Thesis**

A project thesis can look different from a traditional thesis. Your 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. Ten to 12 pages would be the suggested lengths for each chapter.

### **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? 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 do we know about this issue? Review existing reports, and/or policy/administrative/political history of this issue. As you talk about how you are 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 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. This should be readable! Remember to show your information/findings in multiple formats, “pictures, words, and numbers.” Make your findings a delight to read.

### **Chapter 4: Conclusions**

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 should practitioners and researchers need to do to help address this issue? Make sure you return to the big questions you raised at the beginning in your concluding write up.

## **Appendix V: Suggested Six Paragraph Outline for Thesis Based on CAM 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. Ten pages would be the suggested lengths for each section.

### **Chapter 1: Define the Problem**

- Specific problem
- Larger context and background
- Others' experiences
- Literature review

### **Chapter 2: Environment**

- Political environment and constraints
- Legal mandates and issues
- Economic factors
- Social issues

### **Chapter 3: Alternatives**

- Analyze causes of problem
- Define the variables inherent in alternatives
- Reduce and simplify number of alternatives

### **Chapter 4: Criteria**

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

### **Chapter 5: Analysis of Alternatives**

- Project outcomes of all alternatives
- Analyze outcomes in terms of criteria
- Summarize and contrast alternatives
- Confront the trade-offs

### **Chapter 6: Recommendation and Conclusions**

- Tailor recommendation to proper audience/clients
- Long-term versus short-term issues
- Pay attention to implementation

## Thoughts from recent alumni...

### Helpful to:

1. Have the problem statement defined and signed off by both advisors before first night of class.
2. A completed review of literature needs to be done before first night of PPA 500.
3. Thought needs to be given to the entire research process (sampling, methodology, analysis) before PPA 500.
4. Develop a schedule of completion.
5. Update advisors frequently (about every other week) even if it is to tell them bad news.
6. Once beginning writing process, just sit down and write whatever came into my head and not worry about how it sounded, citation, etc.
7. Buy and read *Writing for Social Scientists* (available at [Amazon.Com](https://www.amazon.com)) - this for me because I was nervous about sitting down and writing.
8. Have good working relationship with advisors.
9. If you are doing a survey, start the university paperwork going right away. Do a trial run to make sure you are going to get meaningful responses to the questions.
10. Get the thesis format right from the beginning. Changing formatting midway can really mess with your text and table alignment.
11. Have person other than (and before and after) your advisors proofread your thesis for clarity and grammar.

### About the thesis completion process:

1. Plan to go to the graduate studies thesis sign-off people at least twice (once with a final draft on regular paper, and once with the final draft on the pretty paper). Plan to spend a couple hours there each time.
2. Before going in for graduate studies thesis check, do use a ruler to check your margins on every page. Check the margins for the page numbers, text, and tables.
3. Coordinate availability with your advisors and the department chair so that you can get all of your signatures on time and without running around to fifty different places.