

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

PPA 500
Thesis Seminar Spring 2016
Wednesday 6-8:50 pm (only the Wednesday dates listed in the schedule below)
Folsom Hall 1050

Charles W. Gossett
278-5591 (o)
cwgossett@csus.edu

Office: Tahoe Hall 3033
Office hours: Tuesday 4-5 pm
or by appointment

Introduction and Course Objectives

The sole goal of this course is to help student's complete their thesis by the deadline **May 6, 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 I provide general guidance and support but your primary obligation is to your thesis readers.

We will meet 3 times throughout the term to keep each other 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 [PPA 200, 205, 207, 210, 220A, 220B, 230, 240A and 240B], plus two electives] with at least a B- in each course and an average grade of B or better in all. 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. Acting Chair Rob

Wassmer (Spring 16) is authorized to modify these restrictions (except the advancement to candidacy mandate, which is a University requirement) in exceptional circumstances.

Primary and Secondary Advisors:

It is expected that you will arrive the first day of class with your thesis question, readers identified and your Pre-Thesis form (attached) or the first two chapters of your thesis drafted.

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

Preferences about reading differ for second readers and different "pairs" of readers work differently. Some like to see each piece, others prefer to see 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 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 must be turned into me, is included at the end of this syllabus.

A primary advisor can be drawn from Professors Jez, Gossett, Lascher (on sabbatical Spring 2016), Venezia and Wassmer. A secondary advisor can be chosen from among this same group, PPA instructor Boillard, and other part and full-time professors and instructors at CSUS. In some cases you may work with retired PPA faculty. Others who have taught courses for the department and faculty in other academic departments may also serve as second readers, but before asking such a faculty member to serve as a second reader, consult with me (and I will consult with the Chair) about the appropriateness of that faculty member as a second reader. **Prior approval for second readers from outside the department is required.**

You will need to stay on schedule, if you slip, you will go to the back of the line for your reader. In the case of at least one reader, slippage may result in you being directed to a new reader. 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: Each 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 you with 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. He or she is not there to catch spelling and grammar errors (although they will 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 6 to no later than 8:50 p.m. on four nights throughout the semester. This is not a lecture-based course. All students are required to participate in these 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 will 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). I 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 over the break before the next semester, or, worst case, you have a minimum number of chapters turned in. Please talk to your primary advisor to find out what his/her expectation is. If you have completed your thesis, the RP will be converted to credit (CR) by the Graduate Studies office after you turn in your thesis as they post the grade and your completion.

If you do not receive a grade of RP in 500 you may take it one more time. If you do not "pass" the course a second time you will be dismissed from the University and have to reapply to the University and the program in order to finish. This would require you to compete directly with incoming students for a seat. We will not look favorably on these petitions.

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) Optional - *A Pocket Style Manual*, 2000, Diana Hacker, Third Edition, Bedford Books; available for purchase at bookstore or online. (Most PPA students have already purchased this manual for an earlier class.)

(3) Optional - *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*; 1986, Howard S. Becker, Chicago Press; available for purchase online.

(4) Optional – *How to Write a Thesis*. 1977, Umberto Eco, MIT Press; available for purchase online.

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, especially with Professor Wassmer. 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). I 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.

Session 1 – January 27, 2016

Assignment Due: (1) Pre-thesis prospectus using the attached form. If you are farther along in the process you may submit a complete working draft of your Introduction and Literature Review in lieu of pre-thesis prospectus.

(2) A draft or final (approved) completion of Thesis Question, Advisors’ and Research Partner’s Signatures Sheet (attached). Approvals can be gathered electronically (no signature needed), simply attach a paper copy so I have a complete record.

Session 2 – February 10

Assignment Due: (1) Five minute (max) oral class presentation on the thesis question, with one page outline of sections contained in your thesis, and proposed dates of completion (an example is attached to this syllabus). No visual aids/powerpoint should be used in the oral presentation.

Session 3 – March 2

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 class you get a signoff sheet at the end.

This session will discuss final logistics for turning the thesis in and graduation. If you are slipping behind we will discuss next steps.

Assignment Due: Be prepared to give the class an update on your progress, schedule and any particular challenges you are having.

Session 4 – April 7

We will check in, work on any knotty problems, and discuss logistics for graduation.

Thesis Schedule

	Strongly encouraged deadline	Department requirement	University requirement	Check off when completed
Advancement to candidacy			X	Before registration for PPA 500
Thesis question with signature of primary and secondary advisor and research partner		X January 27		
Graduation application turned in			X February 1	
Introduction and Literature/Background chapter	February 10			
Methodology/approach chapter	March 2			
University Formatting Workshop (in class March 2)			X March 2	
Data/Findings chapter	March 30			
Complete <i>working</i> draft with conclusion	April 6			
Complete draft signed off by advisors	April 20			
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 April 26	
Final copy to Grad Studies office	May 6, 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, 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. 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* 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 it exist already? Can you get permission to use it? Do you have to create it yourself? 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 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 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. 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? Any suggestions you could offer on how to do differently? Be sure you are tying this chapter back to the questions you raised in Chapter 1 and explain how it fits into the literature you cited in Chapter 2.

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. Ten to 12 pages would be the suggested lengths for each section.

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". "Tufte-ize" your findings, may them a delight to read.

Chapter : 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 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 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.

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)