

PPA 500 Syllabus  
Spring 2018

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

Sacramento State

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

**Office Hours:** All instructors (except Ted in **Amador 255**) will be in their Tahoe Hall Office from 4 to 5:30 p.m. on the night that class held.

**Meeting Dates:** Wednesday, Monday, or Friday on January 24 (Rob), February 16 (Su Jin), March 16 (Andrea), and April 11 (Ted)

**Meeting Time:** 6:00 to 8:00 pm (max)

**Meeting Location:** Folsom 1051

**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). Most PPA students have already purchased this manual for an earlier class.

**Course Objective:**

The goal of PPA 500 is to help students complete their thesis by May 4, 2018, or make significant progress that it can be completed the following semester. Details on how to sign up for your required thesis review at the Office of Graduate Studies is at

<http://www.csus.edu/gradstudies/CurrentStudents/Thesis-Project-Dissertation/Submission-and-Deadlines.html>.

To that end, 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 theses, and provision of basic support in a structured environment of feedback.

At a minimum, to receive satisfactory progress in this class, you will need to satisfy what your primary advisor deems as necessary to do this. Please clarify this with him/her at the start of the semester. (Usually this is set 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 I 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 PPA Chairperson Wassmer can modify these restrictions (except the advancement to candidacy mandate, which is a University requirement) in exceptional circumstances.

## **Primary and Secondary Advisors:**

Before the first meeting, 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.

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 advisors early. If a primary advisor already has their share of thesis supervision, they 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. Make individual arrangements 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.

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.

You will need to stay on schedule. 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. 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. We may also have students who are "sitting in" a term ahead of registration for PPA 500 and those who completed 500, but have not finished their thesis.

### **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:**

#### **Prior to First Meeting**

**Minimum** before January 24, 2018:

- (1) Send electronic copy of "PPA 500: Thesis Question and Advisors' Names" (given in Appendix 1) to [rwassme@csus.edu](mailto:rwassme@csus.edu) and your primary advisor;
- (2) Send electronic copy of two-page prospectus/memo defining your problem and explaining why it is important, and the general scope of issue (example given in Appendix II) to [rwassme@csus.edu](mailto:rwassme@csus.edu) and your primary advisor.

**Ideal** before January 24, 2018:

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

## **Session 1 – January 24 – Led by 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, who is affected, 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 presentation, you should 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 one.

## **Session 2 – February 16 – 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 May. 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.

## **Session 3 – March 16 – 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 particular 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.

## **Session 4 – April 11 – 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 class, you get a signoff sheet at the end. 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 Question and Advisors' Names

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

One-Sentence Thesis Question:

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Primary advisor's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Secondary advisor's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix II: Prospectus Example

### *Prospectus for Thesis on Teenage Birthrates*

Deborah Franklin

Working Title: Teen Birthrates in California: What Really Matters?

Major Advisor: Rob Wassmer  
Secondary advisor: Nancy Shulock

#### **Why study teenage birthrates?**

Over the last decade, the issue of teenage birthrates has received attention in the media, legislatures, and political speeches. An article on world population problems in a recent issue of *National Geographic* (2001) included the United States as an example of a nation with a worsening population problem, its teenage birthrate.

How large is the problem of teenage childbearing in the U.S? The teenage birthrate in the U.S. is five percent, which is five percent of teen girls aged 15 to 19 give birth each year. The U.S. has the highest teenage birthrate in the industrialized world. Since 1960, the teenage birthrate has tripled among unmarried females aged 15-19.

Teenage childbearing is expensive. Welfare, food stamps, and Medicaid expenditures for families begun by a teenage mother totaled \$37 billion in 1995. In 1996, The Robin Hood Foundation estimated that teenage parenthood in America cost taxpayers \$6.9 billion a year in increased costs for welfare and food stamps benefits, medical care, incarceration, and foster care. The 1996-97 California State budget included \$73 million in teen pregnancy prevention programs. Funding for prevention programs continues in this year's budget. Despite prevention efforts, in 1997 in California 59,851 births were to teenage mothers, a birthrate of 56.7 births per 1000 women aged 15-19.

One of the costs related to teenage childbearing is dropping out of high school. Hoffman, Foster, and Furstenberg (1989) examined the costs of teenage motherhood and found that teen mothers completed fewer years of education. Only 54% graduated from high school, but an estimated 71% would have graduated if they had delayed childbearing until they were 20 years old. Conversely, dropping out of high school has an effect on teenage childbearing. Leibowitz, Eisen, and Chow (1998) studied pregnant teens in Ventura County and reported that teens who reported higher grades in high school were more likely to choose abortion, and teens that had already dropped out of high school were more likely to give birth. Plotnick (2002) considered the attitudes of teens and its effect on decisions to abort, give birth before marriage, or give birth after marriage. Interestingly, the variables for educational expectation were significantly and positively related to both abortion and marriage before birth. The relationship between teen birthrates and high school dropout rates is both complicated and important to our understanding of teenage childbearing.

The success of efforts to lower the teenage birthrate depends on an understanding of the factors that influence the birthrate. While the teenage birthrate has been steadily dropping in California, it is still high enough to generate concern among policymakers and residents. In my research, I will

look for some of the underlying factors that contribute to our state's teenage birthrate and then consider their implications for public policy.

### **The Question**

*Teenage Pregnancy and Birth in California: Trends and Characteristics* (2000) provides an excellent overview of teen birthrates in California. It concluded that, in general, birthrates vary by race/ethnicity and poverty level. For my thesis, I am interested in other factors related to teenage birthrates. My research for PPA 207 indicates that the high school dropout rates are an important factor. However, teenage birthrates and high school dropout rates have an endogenous relationship. For my thesis I plan to focus my efforts on finding the distinct factors related to each of those rates. The central question that I will be addressing is what cultural, economic, educational, and home and community environmental factors are related to the teenage birthrate. Another question that I will be addressing is what cultural, economic, educational, and home and community environmental factors are related to high school dropout rates. I also want to examine how teenage birthrates and dropout rates affects each other and the magnitude of one's impact on the other.

### **Methodology**

Building on my PPA 207 paper, I will be using regression analysis of aggregate data at the county level as my primary research method. I plan to increase the variables in my original county birthrate variance regression analysis by including a variable for the rate of population change in each county. I will also include a variable for accessibility to reproductive health services. I also plan to use aggregate county level data and regression models to analyze factors related to high school dropout rates. From these multivariate regression models and the theory underlying the models, I hope to be able to draw inferences about the relationship between teenage birthrates and high school dropout rates.

### **Appendix III: 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 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 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 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." "Tufte-ize" your findings, make them 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**

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

### **Chapter 2: Environment**

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

### **Chapter 3: Alternatives**

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

### **Chapter 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

### **Chapter 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

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

- I. Tailor recommendation to proper audience/clients
- II. Long-term versus short-term issues
- III. 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 sitting down and writing whatever came into my head and not worrying about how it sounded, citation, etc.
7. Writing for Social Scientists (red book) - 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.