

California State University, Sacramento

**PPA 500, Section 1**  
**Thesis Seminar**  
Spring, 2020

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Course meeting time and place: Wednesdays,  
6-8:50, Sacramento State Downtown,  
Room 111

Office hours: Mondays & Wednesdays  
3-4 on the main campus; Wednesdays  
5-6 Sacramento State Downtown; and  
by appointment

**Introduction and Overview**

The goal of this section of PPA 500 is to help you complete your thesis in a single semester—or be close enough to completion that you can finish over the summer.

This version of PPA 500 is different from past versions. This change reflects the faculty's frank acknowledgment that both the thesis and thesis seminar were not working as well as needed to move students toward completion of the culminating requirement in a timely manner. Over the longer run we are planning to revise the culminating requirement, reflecting helpful input from students and extensive faculty discussions about what is most appropriate for working professionals. Over the short run (i.e., at minimum the present semester), we aim to provide students with more hands-on assistance and guidance in this course section to enable them to proceed through the various stages of thesis development as expeditiously as possible.

Accordingly, this section of PPA 500 will *meet every week*, whereas past versions of the course met a few times during the semester. We will also have a somewhat tighter focus in terms of the subject matter to be addressed by a thesis. All of this should allow me to provide more guidance and facilitate students working together in a sustained fashion.

**Prerequisites**

The prerequisites for PPA 500 remain the same as they have been in the past. To enroll in this course, you must have completed all but one of the core courses for the MPPA program plus one of the electives (or the equivalent if you are a MS-ULD student) with an overall grade point average of 3.0 or better. You must also have advanced to candidacy.

## **Class Format**

The class will be discussion oriented. I will have some key points to make each class session but will not engage in extensive lectures. There will be considerable time for working individually with students and meeting in small groups. The groups likely will be based on the specific topics chosen and the approach to research (e.g., quantitative analysis, qualitative case studies).

I have identified *tentative* topics for each of the class sessions. However, these are subject to significant revision based on your needs. I will regularly solicit input from you about topics for discussion and class practices, and am prepared to revise plans in accordance with that feedback.

## **Grading and Evaluation**

This is a credit/no credit course. If you finish your thesis in spring 2020 evaluation is simple: you earn a credit grade. You can also earn a grade of “reasonable progress” if and only if: 1) you have completed two thesis chapters that have been approved by *both* of your faculty readers; 2) you have an outline of a third chapter approved by your main advisor; and 3) in the judgment of your primary advisor, you can reasonably be expected to complete the thesis over the summer or early in the following semester. You would then need to sign up for continuous enrollment if you are to complete your thesis in fall of 2020. If you fail to meet the above specified criteria you will earn a grade of “no credit” and will need to retake the course.

## **Thesis Subject Matter**

My default expectation is that students in this section will be working on theses in the area of civic engagement, very broadly defined. The rationale for this choice is pragmatic. I am a political scientist by training and have done some research in this field, and therefore more prepared to provide guidance including suggestions for specific questions to address and data to use. Students may also be able to be more help to each other if they’re working in the same broad area.

I will send students a separate document with some ideas for specific topics and data sets in the area of civic engagement.

I am also open to consideration of ideas in other areas for theses, if you can convince me that your plan is doable within a single semester and I am able to provide appropriate guidance. Moreover, at least in the beginning of the semester the class section is likely to include students who have made significant progress on an unrelated topic but not progressed to the point of qualifying for PPA 500, Section 2, the fully independent study version of the course. Such students may join us initially and then move toward independent research, depending on the progress they are making.

## **Thesis Readers**

The Department continues to require that all theses be approved by two faculty readers. The principal advisor must come from the ranks of the core faculty, i.e., Professors Christopher Cabaldon, Sara McClellan, Andrea Venezia, Rob Wassmer, and me. The second reader can be one of the core faculty members, a part-time faculty member within PPA, another Sacramento State faculty member, or another person with appropriate expertise. Please check with me if you are considering a second reader from outside of PPA.

I will be the default primary advisor for students in this section of PPA 500, but will recommend a faculty colleague for that role as appropriate.

Faculty have developed a set of guidelines for secondary readers that are likely to be helpful both for students and for people considering assuming that role. See <https://www.csus.edu/college/social-sciences-interdisciplinary-studies/public-policy-administration/internal/documents/guide-ppa-secondreaderguidelines.pdf>.

## **Readings**

We will make minimal use of readings unrelated to your own theses, to avoid diverting you from your own projects. You should have a copy of *A Pocket Style Guide* by Diana Hacker and follow that in writing your thesis; presumably you purchased it earlier in the program. I can also provide you recommended general readings for guidance in such areas as writing a literature review. In addition, I may assign previously completed theses or other works as models for you to consider. *I will in part be looking to you for recommendations of what type of reading would be most helpful.*

## **Assignments**

The class session schedule includes tentative assignments. These assignments will not be graded but are important to keep you on track.

## **Attendance**

I expect you to attend every class session. Please contact me in advance if for some reason you are not able to make a particular night.

## ***Tentative Class Schedule***

January 22: Introduction & Choosing a Topic

January 29: Confirmation of a Topic and Specific Research Question

- One-page summary due

February 5: Specification of a Research Approach

- Determination of appropriate readers, to be done in office hours or in class

February 12: Identification of Appropriate Data and How to Obtain It

- Data gathering strategy summary due

February 19: Writing an Effective Introductory Chapter

- Draft first chapter due

February 26: Developing a Literature Review, Part One

March 4: Developing a Literature, Part Two

- Draft literature review due

March 11: Mid-Semester Thesis Status Presentations

March 18: Methods and/or Tools of Analysis

- Methods/analytical tool draft due

March 25: Addressing Methodological Challenges

*No class April 1: spring break*

April 8: Findings

- Findings draft due

April 15: Presentation of Findings

April 22: So What? Considering Conclusions and Implications

- Conclusions/implications due

April 29: Wrapping Up the Thesis

- Abstract due

May 6: Reflections—What Did You Learn from the Process and What Do We Recommend for the Future?