

Syllabus for PPA 230 Public Budgeting and Finance

Fall 2025, 3 Credits

Lecture: Thursday 6-8:50 PM Downtown Center

Office Hours: By Appointment

Lecturer: Christian Griffith

Christian.griffith@gmail.com

Learning Objectives:

This course provides a comprehensive overview of Public Budget and Finance that uses mostly primary documents to allow for experiential learning so that the lessons can be applied in your career. The learning objectives of the course are as follows:

PPA LEARNING OBJECTIVE	HOW APPLIED IN PPA 230
1 a. Diagnose, map, and analyze decision making processes, actors, and context	Learn budget process and accounting rules from different public entities to understand how these tools are used to try to manage and control the direction and policy of each organization.
1 e. Apply context-appropriate criteria to analyze and evaluate alternatives and offer solutions with attention to implementation strategies.	Using recent real-world examples, discuss fiscal policy is shaped and the criteria by which public policy moves forward and how it is implemented and strategize how to question and change that dynamic.
1 f. Identify, critically examine, and use relevant data to inform policy and administrative decisions.	Use budget and financial documents and an understanding of a public organization's fiscal position and use the budget process to identify a path to securing resources.
1 g. Draw upon multiple disciplines to understand and address policy and administration problems.	Learn how accounting, fiscal, and budget processes and practices are used in the formation of policy, the prioritization of an organization's activities, and as a management tool.
2 a. Critically use different analytical skills, processes, and tools to address policy and administration problems.	Consider the assumptions and limitations behind financial information and the role of financial actors within a public organization to craft an approach to solve problems.
2 c. Identify and apply effective and inclusive leadership techniques for public policy and administration.	Understand the key roles and perspective of policy makers, public sector managers, and accounting staff and how these role shape decision making.
3 a. Recognize the role public servants play in advancing or impeding a more prosperous, just, equitable, and inclusive society.	Write and present documents to current practitioners to better understand their information needs and decision-making approaches.
3 b. Understand obligations to advance public value consistent with rule of law and	Reflect on how fiscal and budget policy both shape and reflect the concepts of value and rule of law and the balance between accepting and questioning this reality.

an enduring search for reasonable and just action.	
3 c. Consider the ethical dimensions of choices in public policy and administration	Recognize the power and responsibility that controlling public resources places upon public sector professionals and the expectations for transparency, accountability, and prudence demanded by that responsibility.
3 e. Recognize professional role and responsibility/duty of care to your organization.	Reflect upon the expectations of fiduciary responsibility and how to create a culture of institutional accountability.

Schedule and Readings

There in only one books associated with this course.

1. Darrell Mullis & Judith Orloff, *The Accounting Game: Basic Accounting Fresh from the Lemonade Stand* (Napier, IL: Sourcebooks, 2008)

This book will help familiarize you with basic accounting concepts to reinforce the lessons of the course.

I have also identified readings for each meeting. The more you diligently read these documents, the more our time together can be a discussion rather than a lecture. Since this course draws heavily from current events, I may add some readings over the course of our semester to add to our discussion. However, I will make sure all new readings are free, public domain documents.

The University has a policy to encourage in person instruction as much as possible. However, I have certain class activities that rely on Zoom to allow outside experts to participate virtually and engage with you. Therefore, I have a few dates that will Zoom-only classes. I will clarify which classes will be Zoom-only on the first day of class.

Date	Topic	What you need to do BEFORE this class and what will be assigned during that lecture:
8-28	<p>What is PPA 230 about and why do you have to take it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions • 2025 • The entire course on one slide. • Accounting! • Anticipating the Future • The Dashboard • Forecasting Exercises 	<p>First class</p> <p>Assignment handed out in class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget Exercise Forecast • Class Forecast and Survey • Budget Battle Royale
9-4	<p>General Fund versus Special Fund—and how they play together</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare Forecast with Actuals • How do you react? • Why have Special Funds? • Tricks we have used <p>The Vital Signs of Financial Health, as demonstrated by a Lemonade stand!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance Sheet • Income Statement • Private Sector Versus Public <p>State of California</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of Charts <p>Budget Battle Royale Introduction</p>	<p>Assignments Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring your completed forecast and survey. • Fill Out Lemonade Packet 1 <p>What you need to read/watch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Lemonade Chapters 1-3 • Summary of Charts for California's 2025-26 budget: 2025-26 Enactment Budget Summary - Summary Charts

Date	Topic	What you need to do BEFORE this class and what will be assigned during that lecture:
9-11	<p>Reading budget documents can be boring unless you make the documents fight each other.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget Battle Royale Group Seeding Exercise! Group discussion on what makes a “good budget”. <p>How to ask for things in the budget, (and also how to write your paper that is due on September 25)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget Change Proposal critique Writing effective proposals 	<p>Provide the Budget Battle Royale organization suggestions and interest by September 10th</p> <p>Readings for this class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2025-26 Budget Preparation Guide https://dof.ca.gov/budget/budget-details/ Budget change proposals website. https://bcp.dof.ca.gov/viewBcp.html The “Bee Safe” proposal (2018-19 proposal): https://bcp.dof.ca.gov/1819/FY1819_ORG8570_BCP1775.pdf Nutria Infestation (2021 proposal): https://bcp.dof.ca.gov/2122/FY2122_ORG3600_BCP4556.pdf Finance Staffing (2022 proposal) https://bcp.dof.ca.gov/2223/FY2223_ORG8860_BCP6094.pdf Implementing SB 1064 on Biomarker Testing https://bcp.dof.ca.gov/2526/FY2526_ORG1115_BCP7739.pdf Senate Floor Analysis for SB 1064 https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billAnalysisClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240SB1064# <p>Assignment handed out in class: Write a GOOD Budget Proposal using the official State form for September 25.</p>

Date	Topic	What you need to do BEFORE this class and what will be assigned during that lecture:
9-18	<p>Budget Structure: Who, What, Where, Why, When?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic Budget Structure • What do governments buy? • Different roles, different challenges • Encumbrances • Command and Control • The “blanket” • Why do public agencies order supplies in March? • Why is this statement true: “Cash Rules Everything Around Me”? • The Role of Control Agencies • Overhead <p>Lemonade</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash Management • Cash Versus Accrual • LIFO versus FIFO 	<p>Assignment Due: Fill Out Lemonade Packet 2</p> <p>Readings for this class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lemonade Chapters 4 and 6 (Chapter 5 is disappointing) • The California State Administrative Manual’s description of encumbrances: https://www.dgs.ca.gov/Resources/SAM/TOC/8300/8340 • State Administrative Manual attempts to explain the Salary Blanket https://www.dgs.ca.gov/Resources/SAM/TOC/8500/8531 • The State of California runs out of cash. https://www.sco.ca.gov/Files-EO/cashoutlook_fy0910.pdf • The Controller discusses the State’s Cash situation in 2009 https://www.sco.ca.gov/Files-EO/cashletter05-29-2009.pdf
9-25 Zoom Only Class	<p>Budget Change Proposal Exercise</p> <p><i>Astros at Athletics</i></p>	<p>Assignment Due: Complete your DF-46 Narrative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can find DOF’s form and instructions (but use my instructions) here: https://dof.ca.gov/budget/resources-for-departments/budget-forms/

Date	Topic	What you need to do BEFORE this class and what will be assigned during that lecture:
10-2	<p>Budget Battle Royale: Round 1</p> <p>Lemonade conclusion and Final Test.</p> <p>How budgets are built?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State budget process • A sample local process • Players and politics • Types of budgeting approaches--Baseline, Zero-Based, Performance-Based 	<p>Assignment Due: Fill Out Lemonade Exercise Packet 3</p> <p>Read this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lemonade, Chapters 7-10 <p>Readings for this class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A useful California Budget flowchart http://calbudgetcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/Navigating-the-State-Budget-Process-12.2015.pdf • A report on Performance Based Budgeting: https://abgt.assembly.ca.gov/sites/abgt.assembly.ca.gov/files/PBB%20%282%29.pdf • CTA explains the Local Control Funding formula https://www.cta.org/our-advocacy/local-control-funding-formula • 2025 Multiyear Forecast for California https://ebudget.ca.gov/reference/MultiYearProjection.pdf

Date	Topic	What you need to do BEFORE this class and what will be assigned during that lecture:
10-9	<p>Federal-State-Local Interaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who pays for what and why? • The complicated legacy of Proposition 13. • What is “Realignment” and why? • Discuss ballot-box budgeting • Significant State Propositions • Examples of Local Measures • How do we fix housing in California? <p>California School Budget Discussions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State and Federal role 	<p>Readings for this class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LAO’s long road of State-Local Relationship bumps: https://lao.ca.gov/handouts/localgov/2012/state-local-fiscal-relationship-112912.pdf • “Education Revenue Augmentation Fund” Assembly Budget Committee Subcommittee 5 Agenda for April 16, 2024, Issue 1 (Page 2) https://abgt.assembly.ca.gov/media/7622 • Urban Institute’s Fiscal Democracy in the States How Much Spending is on Autopilot? (Executive Summary and California Chapter: Pages 27-36) https://www.taxpolicycenter.org/sites/default/files/publication/157519/fiscal_democracy_in_the_states_how_much_spending_is_on_autopilot_1.pdf#page=37 <p>Assignments: San Francisco Budget Challenge (10-23)</p>
10-16	<p>Budget Battle Royale: Round 2</p> <p>What is an ACFR?</p> <p>Budgeting for Capital Projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you pay for these? • Net present value—time equals money • Funding big projects • Project approval • Information technology 	<p>Readings for this class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Stockton ACFR (Just skim it and look for at what is in this document!) https://www.stocktonca.gov/Documents/Government/Budget%20And%20Financial%20Reports/Financial%20Reports/ACFR/2023_ACFR.pdf • Are CAFRs useless? http://www.governing.com/topics/finance/gov-are-annual-financial-reports-useless.html • California 5-Year Infrastructure Plan, 2022 (Pages 12 and 24) https://www.ebudget.ca.gov/2022-Infrastructure-Plan.pdf • California 2025 Infrastructure Plan https://ebudget.ca.gov/2025-26/pdf/BudgetSummary/Infrastructure.pdf • 2024 High Speed Rail Business Plan (Chapter 3 Highlights) https://hsr.ca.gov/about/high-speed-rail-business-plans/2024-business-plan/chapter-3/

Date	Topic	What you need to do BEFORE this class and what will be assigned during that lecture:
10-23 Zoom Only Class	San Francisco Budget Challenge How are priorities really set?	Assignment Here is the link for the challenge https://sf.budgetchallenge.org/pages/overview
10-30	Budget Royale Championships Federal Budget and other budgets east of the Sierra Nevada mountains.	Reading for this class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Center for Budget and Policy Priorities: Introduction to the Federal Budget: https://www.cbpp.org/research/policy-basics-introduction-to-the-federal-budget-process A high-level walkthrough of the federal budget process https://www.nationalpriorities.org/budget-basics/federal-budget-101/federal-budget-process/ CBO: Outlook for the Budget and Economy Outlook for the Budget and the Economy Congressional Budget Office (cbo.gov) Pew's Fiscal 50: State Trends and Analysis (Read key findings) https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/data-visualizations/2014/fiscal-50#ind0

Date	Topic	What you need to do BEFORE this class and what will be assigned during that lecture:
11-6	How to cut your budget <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Politics, stakeholders, process, and priorities 	<p>Try to balance the federal budget:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> https://www.federalbudgetchallenge.org/pages/overview <p>Review this website:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Options for Reducing the Deficit: 2025 to 2034 Options for Reducing the Deficit: 2025 to 2034 Congressional Budget Office <p>Reading for this class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LAO: 2009-10 California Spending Plan (Figure 4 on Page 4) https://lao.ca.gov/2009/spend_plan/spending_plan_09-10.pdf LAO: 2024-25 California Spending Plan (Link posted here after Session ends) https://lao.ca.gov/Budget
11-13	Revisiting the State budget, special funds, audits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audits The silver lining of audits How to find money 	<p>Readings for this class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manual of Special Funds homepage https://dof.ca.gov/budget/resources-for-departments/manual-of-state-funds/ A description of the “Single Audit” https://dof.ca.gov/programs/osae/single-audit-act/ <p>Assignment: Final Assignment Memo to the Chair of the Assembly Budget Committee</p>
11-20	Competitive Budget Interactive “Thing”	https://media.wizards.com/2015/downloads/ah/diplomacy_rules.pdf
11-27	Thanksgiving	Eat
12-4	Final Review, Final Paper <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final Presentations Revisiting Forecasts 	Final Assignment Due

THE ENTIRE COURSE IN ONE SLIDE

- Why Understanding the Budget is important:
 1. Forecast organization's expectation of the future environment.
 2. Plan the future course of the organization through allocation and prioritization of resources.
 3. Control and manage the activities of an organization with resources.
 4. Enforce the vision through oversight.
 5. Evaluate progress, efficiency, and performance.
- The Power of Accounting:
 1. Provide an assessment of the current position on an organization in terms of resources.
 2. Identify the greatest strengths and weaknesses for progress towards organization goals.
 3. Create rules and structures that focus resources around priorities.
- Three measures of fiscal health
 1. Balance Sheet
 2. Income Statement
 3. Cash Flow
- Key questions:
 1. What is your role as the policy expert?
 2. How does the existing structure for allocating resources help or hinder efforts to address larger societal problems?

Below are some of the key areas we will cover in this course:

- Learn and apply the basic principles of how budgets of public sector entities are developed:
 - How are budgets built and agreed upon?
 - How do public entities use financial systems for management and control?
 - Why are special funds challenging to budget?
 - How do budgets vary in different agencies and policy areas?
- Gain insight into the perspective of various stakeholders in public finance:
 - Who are the key stakeholders in the budget process?
 - How does the budget itself guide day-to-day operations of public entities?
 - What is the role of a ACFR in financial reporting?
 - What types of approaches do decision makers use to evaluate budget requests?
 - How does the local-state relationship play such a key role in California public finance?
- Leverage this knowledge to improve your effectiveness at work:
 - Why is budgeting for staff so important, but also so difficult?
 - What are some persuasive arguments you can use to advocate for resources?
 - What are likely to be the big policy issues that fiscal staff will talk about in California in 2025?

GRADING Grades are a percentage of 100 with the following values assigned by me

- Over 91: A
- 87-90: A-
- 80- 86: B+
- 70-79: B
- Below 69: B-

CLASS ATTENDANCE I expect students to attend all class sessions unless they have a compelling reason not to do so. Please notify me in advance if you need to miss a class. Except under unusual circumstances, a student who misses three classes will be penalized one entire grade (e.g. an A- for the course will become a B-), and a student who misses more than three classes will receive a failing grade.

CLASSROOM FORMAT This course is intended to be an in-person class with three “Zoom only” sessions for special exercises that better suit the Zoom format. Upon request, I will attempt to link the classroom discussion to a Zoom, so students can watch, but not participate in, sessions. However, limitations in my own technical knowledge, as well as the classroom equipment really limit my ability to accommodate a hybrid classroom discussion, especially for small group conversations.

SPECIAL NEEDS RELATED TO DISABILITIES Should you need assistance with portions of class due to disabilities, please let me know as soon as possible. The University offers services to student with disabilities and I would be glad to refer you to the appropriate campus unit.

ACADEMIC HONESTY I take issues of academic honesty (including avoiding plagiarism) seriously and you should as well. If you are unfamiliar with the specifics of University policy in this area I recommend you review the appropriate section of the on-line University Policy Manual:

<http://www.csus.edu/um anual/AcademicHonestyPolicyandProcedures.htm>.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS I will accept late assignments (or allow for a make-up assignment) only in unusual circumstances. Whether or not a penalty will be assessed depends on the reason (e.g., a family emergency constitutes a good reason for missing a deadline; a competing requirement for another course does not.)

Grading and Assignments

Assignment 1: Forecast Exercises *5 percent of grade*

These simple and fun exercises start off the year. First, you have to fill out your forecast for the session 2 budget. Second you have to project certain economic and social variables that we will track in real time.

Assignment 2: Lemonade Charts *5 percent of grade*

Complete three worksheets associated with the Lemonade workbook to learn basic accounting principles.

Assignment 2: Budget Battle Royale *20 percent of grade*

64 budgets enter, but only one can be the best. You will participate in a group conversation to evaluate different budget documents over several weeks. This will allow us to explore how to use budget documents, why they vary, and how budgets look at various levels of government.

Assignment 3: Budget Change Proposal *25 percent of grade*

You will write a Budget Change Proposal using the Department of Finance directions and forms. You will then present your proposal to Department of Finance staff for their evaluation and feedback.

Assignment 4: San Francisco Budget Challenge *20 percent of grade*

You will be assigned a fictitious role that has a role in passing the budget for the City and County.

Assignment 5: Memo to the Chair of the Assembly Budget Committee *25 percent of grade*

You will write a painfully short memo to Chair of the Assembly Budget Committee associated with a potential idea for the Assembly to champion in 2026.