

**California Judicial Fellowship Program
California State University, Sacramento
PPA 298A Syllabus - Fall 2026**

**California State University, Sacramento
Center for California Studies
304 S Street, Sacramento 95811**

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Office Hours: as scheduled
Office Hours Location: as communicated

Overview:

The purpose of this course is to provide academic perspective and to complement your experiential learning arising from placement in a trial court or Judicial Council of California office. The fall seminar blends academic theory with practice. The academic component will focus on judicial branch administrative history, structures, governance, policy development, select contemporary topics, and judicial process supported by experiential learning. The overall goal is to acquire the knowledge needed to understand, evaluate, and analyze the policies, practices, procedures, and institutional role of the California judicial system. This will enhance your contribution to the judicial branch and to your placement. Academic seminar will be held once a month in person at locations communicated to you by the Program. Academic seminars will synchronize with your similarly scheduled field seminars. PPA 298A requires written and oral projects and papers, as well as participation in group discussions. The fall semester provides both a pragmatic and theoretical foundation that culminates with a term paper due in December.

Catalog Description:

Critical examination and analysis of the administrative operation of the California judicial system and its structures, policies, and practices. This course is only open to students admitted to the Judicial Fellowship Program.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

Students will be able to:

1. Understand the basic features of judicial branch institutional history, structure, governance, management, and administration;
2. Describe and explain distinctive aspects of the California judicial system with particular focus on trial courts, trial court culture, court unification, the role of courts in our democracy, and judicial independence;
3. Understand and apply key institutional performance measures;
4. Employ research, writing, and oral presentation skills.

Academic Seminar Format:

The seminar itself encompasses one full day each month, potentially augmented by periodic online activities, and mandatory office hours. Seminar begins at 9:00 a.m. and concludes by 5:00 p.m. with a lunch break and two 10 to 15-minute breaks. Seminar is not a lecture class, although there is typically a short introduction to the material and a review of the class agenda. The seminar is discussion-based and guided by study questions, presentations, group exercises, and role-playing scenarios utilizing the assigned readings, written assignments, case studies, and any additionally assigned discussion boards. Fellows must be agents of their own learning and come prepared to share their ideas and engage intellectually with each other. Most critically, they must demonstrate their ability to synthesize course content and link it to their placement and the larger environment. This is the essence of experiential learning.

Academic Seminar Participation:

Active participation is vital to the seminar learning environment and it is therefore required. Effective student engagement is predicated on completing and digesting all reading and writing assignments and it is, therefore, heavily weighted towards the final grade. Seminar engagement includes oral presentation and group facilitation - opportunities to personally develop a key professional skill and to build self-

**California Judicial Fellowship Program
California State University, Sacramento
PPA 298A Syllabus - Fall 2026**

confidence. Students are expected to demonstrate knowledge of the seminar subject or topic by asking relevant questions, answering questions, providing reasonable explanations, and exploring connections to their workplace experience. Discussion and presentation should reflect a student's increased mastery over their newly acquired vocabulary (legal and technical terms) often unique to court administration. Seminar discussions, group exercises, team interactions, and any online discussions will be respectful and collegial.

The forum is intended to promote student interaction, deepen student learning, build class community, and increase student engagement. The role of courts in our society is evolving rapidly, and on a daily basis some aspect of the judiciary appears in the news. Seminars will also therefore provide a structured opportunity to identify and explore current (and sometimes perennial) issues involving courts, society, politics, and by inference the administration of the judiciary.

Course Grades:

Letter grades (A – F) are based on the below assignments. Students are required to research and produce a minimum of 25 pages of written material for the fall semester.

(1) A series of papers and outlines on various seminar topics and issues	40%
(2) A term paper and presentation	30%
(3) Seminar participation, preparedness, and discussion engagement	30%
	100%

Grading scale:

A:	≥ 94%
A-:	90 – 93.9%
B+:	87 – 89.9%
B:	84 – 86.9%
B-:	80 – 83.9%
C+:	77 – 79.9%
C:	74 – 76.9%
C-:	70 – 73.9%
D+:	67 – 69.9%
D:	64 – 66.9%
D-:	60 – 63.9%
F:	≤ 59.9%

Attendance and Participation Policy:

Attendance and participation in seminar, office hour attendance, and completion of all academic assignments are mandatory. Acceptance of admission into the Judicial Fellowship Program is a commitment to complete all assigned work, attend each class session, and be prepared for active discussion. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) for any course work is strictly prohibited and shall be considered plagiarism. Failure to fulfill the terms of the academic program, failure to perform in a professional manner, plagiarism, unauthorized absences, and chronic tardiness at seminar, office hours, or office placement will be cause for prompt administrative review and may result in termination from the program or other sanctions. In addition to attendance and "seat time," the quality of preparation for and participation in class discussions will be reflected in grading.

**California Judicial Fellowship Program
California State University, Sacramento
PPA 298A Syllabus - Fall 2026**

Required Texts - Fall Semester:

Trial Courts as Organizations - Ostrom, et al.
The Art and Practice of Court Administration – Aikman (sent to you electronically)
American Court Management – Saari (located online in Canvas)
Overview of Court Administration in the United States – Tobin (located online in Canvas)
These Estimable Courts: Understanding Public Perceptions of State Judicial Institutions and Legal Policy-Making – Cann and Yates
Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services – Lipsky
The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?, 3rd Edition – Rosenberg
Online Courts and the Future of Justice - Susskind

Required Selected Readings: See the monthly seminar readings posted to the course in Canvas. There will be extensive non-textbook readings located there.

Communication & Office Hours:

Assignments, readings, grades, course announcements, and any other communication about the course will be communicated exclusively via email and through the course in Canvas. Office hours will be held as scheduled through email communication or canvas announcements, and I will indicate whether they will be held by phone or video meeting.

Paper Requirements and Deadlines

At least one paper or outline or both will be due for each fall seminar – the paper length will vary from 3 to 5 or more pages depending upon the material to be covered. The term paper instructions are treated separately below. Seminar papers and all other writings are due in accordance with the below schedule (and subject to change). Papers are to be submitted on the corresponding assignment page in Canvas by the due date. Late papers will not be accepted but for extenuating circumstances. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) for written assignments is strictly prohibited and shall be considered plagiarism.

Seminar Assignment Due Dates (subject to change in Canvas):

Seminar Dates	Assignment Due Dates
September 9	September 7
October 15	October 13
November 13	November 11
December 10	Term Paper due December 8, Presentations on December 10

Drafting and Format Requirements:

Writing is a craft and requires practice. Stick to the topic or title that has been assigned, answer the question, draw from the material in the course, marshal your evidence, and draft and redraft and redraft again (without using AI). Here are the drafting and format requirements.

California Judicial Fellowship Program
California State University, Sacramento
PPA 298A Syllabus - Fall 2026

1. Double-space the paper with 1.25" margins.
2. Use 12-point Times New Roman font.
3. Upper left corner of the first page single-spaced: Your Name, Title of Course: PPA 298A - CSUS, My Name, Title of Paper:____, Date Submitted: October XX, 2026.
4. Paginate.
5. If a title page or bibliography is used, do not count it towards the length of the essay or paper.
6. All papers require APA citation style, but a bibliography should be used instead of a reference list. You are obligated to document the source or sources you use when writing your papers. This includes all sources consulted, not only those cited in your writing.
7. Use endnotes if needed, for all papers.
8. Electronic format is Microsoft Word. Other formats will be rejected. No Google Docs.
9. File-naming Conventions: Last name - Month - Title (e.g., Outlines; e.g., Pound Paper, etc.)
10. Outlines: Reading outlines are submitted in one document. The format, structure and content are of your choosing. The outlines should demonstrate you have read the material.

Critical Writing and Thinking Guidelines for All Assignments and Papers:

Bearing in mind the importance of the written word in the judicial branch setting (and academia), the below evaluative criteria are used when marking seminar papers. Note that content, clarity, and conciseness are heavily weighted, and plagiarism is grounds for dismissal. The use of AI is considered plagiarism.

The best papers demonstrate that the writer has thought hard and seriously about the readings, has come to conclusions that reflect relevant information and ideas and evidence, and has made a logical connection between these and the writer's own carefully considered experiential learning. Before submitting each paper, use the below criteria as a finalization checklist.

Organization (25 points)

1. Introduction clear (i.e., Early on you explain what this paper will tell me.);
2. Clearly worded thesis statement early in paper (e.g., first or second paragraph);
3. One main point per sentence;
4. Topic sentences in paragraphs (one main point per paragraph) that together will support your thesis;
5. Support (body) paragraphs fully developed and unified;
6. Smooth, logical transition between paragraphs;
7. Conclusion summarizes main points and restates thesis.

Content (50 points)

1. Appropriate title;
2. Supporting paragraphs strongly support the thesis with evidence such as facts, statistics, experiential examples, and, importantly, connections and reference to assigned readings;
3. Paper content is the assigned length;
4. Appropriate word choice and technical vocabulary are used.

California Judicial Fellowship Program
California State University, Sacramento
PPA 298A Syllabus - Fall 2026

Format, Grammar, Mechanics (25 or more points)

1. Sentence completeness (no run-ons, comma splices, split infinitives or sentence fragments, etc.);
2. Paragraph completeness (no run-ons or incoherent thoughts strung together);
3. Comma usage as necessary in compound sentences;
4. Apostrophe usage correct, e.g., possessive case
5. Grammar
6. Verb usage;
7. Spelling;
8. Vocabulary;
9. Numbers and calculations used correctly in text.

Fall Term Paper

The fall term paper will provide you with an early opportunity to independently study an area of interest related to courts that you may have identified either in your application to the Program, in your interview, or that has arisen since then. At the first seminar, be prepared to discuss topics of interest as this will enable you to more quickly delve into a subject that interests you and has some connection to judicial administration. You will be accorded a fair degree of latitude given the broad scope of this discipline, but you may be required to change your topic if it is too similar to another fellow's. At the October seminar, you will declare your topic. Barring changing circumstances and my approval, you will not be allowed to change your topic after that. Choose a topic that you are interested in and can stick with.

Be advised, primary research (surveys, interviews, facilitated expert meetings, etc.) is too time consuming for the short time you have and therefore not allowed. The paper must rely on existing sources of information, data, research, etc. You must establish a research question or questions you wish to explore and find sources that meet the needs of your paper. The paper should be a minimum of 20 pages of writing and no longer than 60 pages of writing. To the extent possible, the paper should attempt to reflect your interests, anything related to your research questions that you have learned from your placement experience and, importantly, the knowledge you are gaining through seminar readings and discussions. Your placements and interests are very diverse, so each paper is expected to have unique characteristics and unique challenges. One challenge we all face is the discontinuous nature of our seminar schedule and our infrequency of contact. For some this may be a contributing factor to the pace and direction with which the paper will progress. To help address this specific issue, mandatory office hours will be scheduled throughout the semester. I am also available as needed for consultation.

California Judicial Fellowship Program
California State University, Sacramento
PPA 298A Syllabus - Fall 2026

Term Paper Section Headings and Content: I have prepared the following list of seven headings and general content descriptions for each section of your paper to provide some guidance for those who may not have had experience in writing or structuring a lengthy paper. The specific content and headings will vary from paper to paper according to your topic and the direction you have taken.

I. Title

II. Abstract (short summary of your topic, what question or questions you were seeking answers to - less than 50 words)

III List of Contents: The list (or table of contents) should follow the section headings below or as otherwise contained in your paper. Include sub-headings or sub-sections if you are using them.

IV Introduction: This is an expansion of the abstract.

V. Literature Review and Analysis: One or multiple sections depending on the number and complexity of topics covered - probably only one section for most papers. You are encouraged to use our textbooks and seminar material as part of the literature review and analysis.

- Describe what is already known about the subject or topic of your paper.
- Evaluate the literature (is it superannuated (old), irrelevant, non-existent, differentiated in some way, is it from an out of state court, not a trial court, a different discipline, etc).
- Describe the relationship of your paper to this earlier material: studies, reports, texts, articles, etc. For example, if the material is out of date, your work is likely to bring some aspect of it up to date, or create new information, or correct old information, or bring new insights.

VI. Methodology and Data

- If you collected data, what kind of data (secondary sources, interviews, records, surveys, etc. did you collect)? If you did not collect data, then do not have a methodology and data section.
- Why was this data selected (it addressed the question by _____, it was available, I had access and consent, it appeared to be representative, it had been used by others, etc.).
- What additional data would you have preferred but did not have access to or time to collect?
- If you collected data, how was it analyzed, and what conclusions, if any, did you form regarding the data?

VII Final Chapter (Conclusions and Summary of Analysis)

- What questions did you answer or analyze and what are the answers? Both the questions and answers may be very different from the ones you began with. Describe any phenomenon or information that surprised you or caused you to reconsider preconceptions or early hypotheses (pretty much these would be your initial questions or focus).
- You should be able to link your analysis to the literature review (previous knowledge). Pound, Saari, Aikman, Tobin, Yates, Ostrom, Lipsky, and others whose writings you will have studied clearly fall into the category of previous knowledge and may be referenced and integrated into your analysis and conclusions as appropriate. There are numerous important article readings required for seminar in addition to the texts noted in the syllabus. Use them as resources throughout your studies and apply them effectively in your papers.

California Judicial Fellowship Program
California State University, Sacramento
PPA 298A Syllabus - Fall 2026

- What have you learned from your experience preparing the paper? And if you were pursuing a policy issue or practice, are there implications or recommendations? You are expected to have learned lessons from the experience. Some of those lessons are likely to include the degree of difficulty you encountered in obtaining information, in scaling the scope of your paper, the paucity of literature on the subject, the reliability of and access to certain categories of information, e.g., criminal justice, juvenile justice, mental health, drug treatment, data external to the court, and private or confidential or protected information.

Below is a schedule to help guide the development of your paper.

PPA 298A Term Paper Development Schedule	
Due Date	Deliverable
September 7	Submit list of topic interests online in Canvas
September 9 in Seminar	Discuss topic interests and tentatively select topic
September 16	Confirm topic. A one paragraph summary is due. This leaves a little more than 2.5 months before the paper is due.
October 15 in Seminar	Declare topic. You cannot change your topic after this without my approval.
October Office Hours (TBA)	Progress Check-in
November 11	Outline of Paper (like an annotated table of contents). Breakout discussions and Peer Review during November Seminar. Paper due in about a month.
November Office Hours (TBA)	Progress check-in (e.g., literature review, data plan, draft progress, etc.)
Prior to Submission	Draft Paper Peer Review (include with final paper)
December 8	Paper Due
December 10 in Seminar	Paper Presentations