PPA500: Culminating Experience

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Office hours: M &W 4:30-6 pm, or by appointment

First Group Meeting	5 pm, Sep 7 via Zoom
Outlines with Timeline	Sep 14 via Canvas
Second Group Meeting	5 pm, Oct 19 via Zoom
Final Draft Submission	Nov 30 via Canvas
Project Approval	First week of Dec (TBD)
Showcase	Second week of Dec (TBD)

Description & Objectives

PPA500 represents the beginning of the end of your MPPA journey. This course will help you complete your culminating project by the end of this semester. We will meet twice in a group via Zoom throughout the semester to keep each other on track. Aside from these group meetings, each student will interact with me via Zoom or in person throughout the semester.

PPA500 is not a lecture-based course, and there is no required textbook. Our two group sessions are interactive sessions in which students present the progress of their culminating project and provide peer feedback. Therefore, students must come prepared to each session with a five-minute summary of their progress.

The culminating project has three goals:

- **Integrate, synthesize, and apply.** Over your MPPA journey, you have studied various frameworks, concepts, and analytical lenses from public policy and management, economics, political science, research methods, and more. In this capstone, we weave these strands together and apply them to an actual policy and/or administration problem.
- **Demonstrate learning objectives.** Conferral of the MPPA degree represents the achievement by a student of 19 learning objectives in three general groups: (1) critical and integrative thinking, (2) practical application, and (3) professional role.
- **Showcase your capabilities.** Demonstrating your learning is crucial for professional employers, future education, such as doctoral study or fellowships, and yourself. The products of your culminating experience are an opportunity to showcase what you can do in multiple ways and for varied audiences.

Course Outline and Assignments

We will have two Sunday meetings throughout the semester. Our meetings will help you stay on track for completion and allow you to receive peer feedback on your progress. Please prepare a five-minute (up to ten-minute) presentation in each meeting that shows the plan and the progress of your project. What you will present is listed in bulleted points in the table below.

In your first presentation, please focus on your research question and the purpose of your project. This will help you identify targeted audiences and can clarify problem definition(s), key concepts, or potential frameworks you will use to explore and understand your topic. Since it is an initial plan done in the early stages of development, do not worry about extensive detail or coherence. You can also edit your plan after the first presentation. Zoom links will be provided via Canvas.

Date	Topic	Assignment
Zoom Sep 7	• Present your research question in one or two sentences • Purpose of your research • Targeted audiences • Format of your project (e.g., policy report, career portfolio, etc.) • Discuss the theoretical framework or a concept/tool you will use in the literature review section (Otherwise, your general plan on how to organize your literature review section) • Your general plan for proceeding with the culminating project • Summarize what will be done by the next group meeting • Any feedback/questions	Prepare a five- (to ten) minute ppt presentation introducing your topic and general plans.
Zoom Oct 19	• Summarize what you have done so far. • Summarize what will be done by the final deadline • Any feedback/questions	Prepare a five-minute presentation that shows your progress.

Note: Note that there will be one-on-one interaction (via email or meeting) besides these two scheduled meetings. Depending on your needs and writing pace, we may schedule more group meetings. We will discuss this in our first meeting.

PPA500 Writing & Showcase

- You can choose to write a policy/admin report (Option 1), an academic paper (Option 2), or a career portfolio (Option 3). If you choose to write the academic paper, consult me beforehand.

- In your final paper, include 1) a cover page containing your title and name and 2) an executive summary. Use one-inch margins, 12-point font, pagination, double-spacing, and APA citations (https://csus.libguides.com/APAstyle/home). Your paper should be between 20 and 50 double-spaced pages, including an appendix, tables, and references. Please check our culminating project bank (https://www.csus.edu/college/social-sciences-interdisciplinary-studies/public-policy-administration/thesis-project-bank.html) For a detailed understanding, please read *Further Guidelines for MPA Culminating Project-Policy Papers* at the end of this syllabus.

- At the end of the semester, prepare a ten-minute slide presentation for the MPPA Culminating Project Showcase. There will be a five-minute Q&A session after each presentation. You can see previous culminating project presentations and slides at: https://www.youtube.com/@GASPPA.

Grading

Only two grades can be obtained in this class: reasonable progress (RP) or no credit (NC). Reasonable progress means that you finish all elements of this class, present your showcase, and earn your advisor's approval at the end. Therefore, it is essential to work closely with your advisor throughout the semester and attend and participate in three sessions of PPA500. If you do not receive a passing grade in this class, you have to retake this course.

Class Participation and Attendance

I expect you to attend all virtual sessions unless you have a critical reason not to. Please let me know in advance if you inevitably miss a class.

Further Guidelines for MPPA Culminating Project
(Common for all PPA500 sections)

BACKGROUND

Beginning in the fall of 2020, PPA faculty moved from requiring students to complete a master's thesis for their culminating project. Instead, we started offering students a choice among three options to meet the culminating project requirement: 1) a policy report, like one that might be developed by the Legislative Analyst's Office or the like; 2) a draft academic journal article; or 3) a career-oriented portfolio. We intended to simplify the project requirement, making it easier for students to complete it in a single semester when taking PPA 500 (previously, it was common for students to finish a thesis over multiple semesters). We were also responding to student requests supporting projects that were more applied and closer to the type of work they might be conducting in their professional life.

We believe the change has worked well overall. Most students have completed their projects in a single semester, as desired. Student input has also been positive regarding the relevance of the work undertaken.

We have also observed that most students opt for the policy report option. That is fine with the faculty; we have commonly recommended that approach. Yet questions have arisen about what constitutes "data" for the policy report and how it relates to prior courses since we have strongly urged students to build on work in previous MPPA core classes. We respond to such questions in the present document.

SUMMARY OF THE POLICY REPORT OPTION (taken in part from prior PPA documents)

The policy report addresses an issue in public policy, public management, or both. It offers a concise summary, states why the topic is essential, uses one or more conceptual frameworks to structure its analysis, and gives evidence to make a compelling argument. One way of satisfying this is the form of "rational policy analysis" taught in PPA 220B, where you explore options or alternatives to address the issue and then use evidence to recommend a way forward. However, other analytic frameworks (e.g., those rooted in critical methods, historical methods, or organizational theory) are equally valid for use. The final report should be between 20 and 50 double-spaced pages, including graphics, tables, and references, with the length depending on the nature of the specific topic.

FURTHER GUIDELINES

o   You must address an apparent, specific problem. We take this requirement very seriously. A general review of the affordable housing crisis is inappropriate for an MPPA culminating project report. An analysis of whether changes in accessory dwelling unit laws have desirable effects may be. We require that you state the policy or administrative problem in the first five pages of your project and highlight it in the executive summary you must submit to the Office of Graduate Studies.

o   We expect students to build off ideas they have developed in other classes. Students who want to do something else should clear it with their advisor at least a month, preferably months, before starting the project and make a compelling case for why this is desirable.

o   We expect your culminating project to go significantly beyond your prior work in another course. This is not a matter of simply recycling a previously submitted paper.

- We do not expect students to collect any new original (primary) data for the project. However, it may be desirable to supplement existing information with limited new primary data (e.g., from a few interviews with policymakers) and data (secondary) already gathered by others. For example, within a single semester, it generally is not feasible to develop and administer a survey and analyze the resulting data. Accordingly, you should not expect to do so.

    - However, it may be possible to draw from data previously used in another course (e.g., PPA 207) or complete a data collection effort designed in another course (e.g., PPA 205).

    - Or, you may use a data set gathered by another researcher, think tank, advocacy group, or government agency that is easily accessible and relevant to your master's project's underlying question. You may learn in PPA 205 or 207 of such data sets available from the Inter-University Consortium on Political and Social Research (ICPSR) or elsewhere

- Following the prior points, the heart of your analysis may consist of a literature review. Your contribution may be to go beyond what has been written to draw specific implications for the problem you are addressing.

- Your problem may be scaling up or transferring a policy solution that has worked elsewhere. For example, small county X may have tried a particular administrative approach, and the challenge before you may be how to transfer that to a larger, more complex county Y.

- You need to think about what "client" (e.g., a state or local agency, advocacy group, or the State Legislature) would be interested in your work and frame the final product accordingly. This may be a real person or group that has identified a particular project with whom you have been in contact. But it may also be a potential client that could reasonably be expected to be interested in your analysis.

- While this is not required, we encourage consideration of projects that might interest your worksite but you have not yet been able to undertake. We would be most pleased if your culminating project has practical benefits for you and your employer.

A NOTE ABOUT THE DRAFT ACADEMIC JOURNAL ARTICLES AND PORTFOLIO PROJECT OPTIONS

Some of you may decide between doing a policy report or a draft academic journal article for your culminating project. Be aware that the expectations for each of these differ markedly. It would be best if you had a serious conversation with an academic advisor before choosing the scholarly journal option. We also allow an option to compose a Portfolio in satisfaction of an MPPA master's project. Details on what is entailed in doing this are at the PPA website https://www.csus.edu/college/social-sciences-interdisciplinary-studies/public-policy-administration/thesis-project-overview.html. This option is also "out-of-the-ordinary," and again you should have a serious conversation with an academic advisor before you choose the latter option.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS…

Talk to the faculty. We want to help you finish, become alums, and do great things. We do not want you to get to PPA 500 and say, "Hmm, maybe I should think about what I'm doing for a culminating project."