



PPA500: Culminating Experience

Fall 2023

Instructor: Ahrum Chang, PhD
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Office: Downtown office 230
Office hours: By appointment

Required Sunday Virtual Meetings	5:30pm-7:00pm on Sep 3 rd , Oct 8 th , and, Nov 19 th
Required Final Paper Approval/Submission	TBD for the week of Dec 1 st
Required Final Project Showcase	TBD for the week of Dec 12 th
Zoom Link	https://csus.zoom.us/j/7714578257

Description & Objectives

This course will help you complete your culminating project by the end of this semester. To this end, we will meet three times via zoom throughout the semester to keep each other on track. PPA500 is not a lecture-based course and there is no required textbook. Each session will include interactive sessions involving students presenting the progress of their culminating project and providing peer feedback. Therefore, students are required to come prepared to each session with a summary of their progress.

The culminating project has three-related goals:

- **Integrate, synthesize, and apply.** Over your MPPA journey, you have studied various frameworks, concepts, and analytical lens from public policy and management, economics, political science, research methods, and more. In this capstone project, 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 like doctoral study or fellowships, and, of course, yourself. The products of your culminating experience are an opportunity to showcase what you can do in multiple ways and for varied audiences.

This experience should help you answer multiple questions:

- What can you do that you could not do before your graduate study?
- What are you capable of doing and contributing that distinguishes you in the world of policy and administration?

You will reflect on these questions throughout the semester with your primary advisor and as a group during three Sunday Zoom sessions and a final Culminating Project Showcase.



Prerequisites

- Advancement to candidacy
- Completion of all but one of the core courses in the MPPA curriculum and one of the electives
- GPA of 3.0 or better
- Agreement with your primary faculty advisor on a culminating option, a topic, and the selection of an artifact(s) constituting prior systematic study of the topic.

Writing Expectations

- As always, please submit well-written, typed, proofread writings on time. You can choose to write a policy/admin report (Option 1), an academic journal paper (Option 2), or a career-oriented portfolio (option 3). If you choose to write the academic paper, please consult with your primary advisor in advance.
- In your paper, make sure to 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, graphics, tables, and the list of references. Please check our culminating project bank (<https://www.csus.edu/college/social-sciences-interdisciplinary-studies/public-policy-administration/thesis-project-bank.html>)
- For the detailed directions, please make sure to read *Further Guidelines for MPA Culminating Project-Policy Papers* at the end of this syllabus.

Showcase Expectations

- Please prepare a ten-minute slide presentation in 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>.

Students and Project Topic

Student	Primary Advisor	Topic (Tentative)
Alicia Albornoz	Dr. Ted Lascher	TBD
Ally Grubbs	Dr. Ted Lascher	TBD
Deanna Latour-Jarquin	Dr. Ahrum Chang	TBD
Evangelina Chavez	Dr. Wayne Linklater	TBD
Griffin Parikka	Dr. Ahrum Chang	TBD
Juliet Terry	Dr. Ahrum Chang	TBD
Paul Shafer	Dr. Ted Lascher	TBD
Timothy Knox	Dr. Ahrum Chang	TBD

Course Outline and Assignments

We will have Sunday evening meetings for three times throughout the semester. Our meetings will

help you stay on track for completion and allow you to receive peer feedback on your progress. Aside from writing a paper in consultation with your primary advisor, you will submit one written assignment at the beginning of the semester and prepare three presentations via zoom.

By 9pm on August 31st, please submit a paragraph (or two) that summarizes your problem statement and a brief explanation or a map/sketch on artifacts that you will use from previous classes to canvas. Based on your previous MPPA coursework and your professional experience/background, identify a specific policy or administrative topic you would like to focus on and write this in a paragraph or two. Then, look over the artifacts you completed in your coursework and indicate concepts/topics/frameworks/analytical methods/or tools you will use for your project. Do not worry if your artifact(s) does not completely fit your topic. You may also think about what you learned from the artifacts. This written assignment will become a brief plan for what you will present in our first meeting on September 3rd. There is no required page length/format/and style for this written assignment.

In addition, please prepare a five-minute presentation in each meeting that shows the progress of your project. You don't need to submit presentation materials/slides to canvas. What you will present is bulleted list in the table below. In your first presentation on September 3rd, please focus on problem definition(s), concepts, or frameworks you will use to explore and understand your topic. Do not present policy recommendations or conclusions. Your plan is in the early stages of development, so do not worry about extensive detail or coherence. Present an overview of your culminating project.

Date	Topic	Assignment
On Zoom 09-03	What is your culminating project contribution? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce your topic/research question(s) • Sketch or map of artifacts that relate to your topic • PPA lenses and tools you will use • Discuss your format (policy/administration report or academic paper) • Identify your client and explain why they are interested in your topic • History of why and how this became a policy concern for your clients • Rough working outline • Product promised for our next meeting • Your plan to seek advice from your advisor 	Due 9pm on Aug 31 st (or earlier) to Canvas -Problem Statement -Artifacts from prior classes Prepare a five-minute presentation that shows your progress
On Zoom 10-08	Have you completed the products promised at last meeting? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarize your progress • What has been your greatest successes? • What do you need to concentrate on during further work? • Insights for others garnered from your advisor • Updated working outline • Products promised for next meeting 	Prepare a five-minute presentation that shows your progress
On Zoom 11-19	Are you on track to finish written product and present at MPPA Culminating Project Showcase? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarize your progress • What has been your greatest successes? • What do you need to concentrate on during further work? • Insights for others garnered from your advisor • Updated working outline • Products promised for next meeting 	Prepare a five-minute presentation that shows your progress



Grading

There are only two grades that can be obtained in this class—reasonable progress (rp) or no credit. Reasonable progress means that you finish all elements of this class, present your showcase, and earn your primary advisor's approval at the end. Therefore, it is essential to work closely with your primary 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 take it one more time. If you do not pass the course a second time you may have to reapply to the University and the Program just to finish your culminating project. Please expect to finish your culminating project in the fall 2023 semester.

Class Participation and Attendance

We have a tremendous opportunity to learn from each other. The best way to take this class is to be prepared and willing to share your own thoughts and ideas. You will receive a reduced class participation grade if you consistently fail to engage in class participation.

I expect you to attend three virtual sessions unless you have a critical reason not to do so. Please let me know in advance if you must be late or leave early. Please notify me and your primary advisor if you need to miss the class.

Late Assignments

I will not accept late assignments unless you experience a highly unusual circumstance. Please don't hesitate to contact me and your primary advisor if you have difficulty meeting a deadline or need further assistance.

Student with Disabilities

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADA) covers issues relating to disability and accommodations. Students with disabilities that could affect their ability to participate in the course or perform well on graded assignments should see me early in the semester. I am receptive to these situations and will try to make any reasonable accommodations. If a student has questions or needs an accommodation in the classroom (all medical information is treated confidentially), please contact:

Services for Students with Disabilities
Division of Student Affairs,
(916)-278-6955, sswd@csus.edu.

Academic Honesty

Students should familiarize themselves with the University Honor Code and Academic Honesty Policy, particularly as it relates to plagiarism and related concerns. The Student Code of Conduct defines academic misconduct, non-academic misconduct and the consequences or penalties for each. The Student Code of Conduct is available at <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/student-conduct/academicdishonesty.html>.



Further Guidelines for MPPA Culminating Project Policy Papers August 2023

OVERVIEW

This document provides further guidelines for MPPA students opting to write a policy report for their culminating project, thereby clarifying expectations.

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

- 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.

- 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.
- 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...

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."