

Syllabus*
California State University Sacramento
Graduate Program in Public Policy and Administration

* Announcements and changes to the syllabus will be posted on webct
August 20, 2013

PPA 500
Thesis Seminar Fall 2013
Monday 6-8:50 pm (only the Monday's listed in the schedule below)
ARC 1007

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Introduction and Course Objectives

The sole goal of this course is to help student's complete their thesis by the **TENTATIVE** deadline **December 6, 2013 at 3:00 pm.**

To that end the course provides faculty and peer guidance in preparation of material to satisfy the Master's thesis requirement. This includes clarification of general program expectations and appropriate deadlines, support in completion of theses, and provision of basic support in a structured environment of feedback.

Format of Course and Expectations of Students

Each class session will include interactive sessions involving students reporting on progress and problem solving with peer feedback and consultation. As instructor of record I provide general guidance and support but your primary obligation is to your readers.

We will meet 4 times throughout the term to keep each other on track and provide assistance as necessary. You are expected to come prepared to discuss your own work and to support others as appropriate.

There are university-wide thesis writing groups that you can also join. They are described at http://www.csus.edu/wac/thesis_groups.stm.

Prerequisite:

To enroll in this course you must have completed all but one of the courses in the Public Policy and Administration Program [PPA 200, 205, 207, 210, 220A, 220B, 230, 240 (or 240A and 240B if appropriate), plus two electives] with at least a B- in each course and an average grade of B or better in all. Accordingly, students cannot enroll in PPA 500 until their last semester of course work and are no longer allowed to take more than one course (other than an internship course) in

addition to PPA 500. It is also necessary to have advanced to candidacy before enrolling in PPA 500. Chair Rob Wassmer is authorized to modify these restrictions (except the advancement to candidacy mandate, which is a University requirement) in exceptional circumstances.

Primary and Secondary Advisors:

It is expected that you will arrive the first day of class with your thesis question, readers, and at least the first two chapters drafted.

We intend to have primary advisor roles divided up equally among PPA professors and thus it is essential that you secure the permission of your desired advisors early. If a primary advisor already has their share of thesis supervision they can suggest another PPA professor that you should contact.

Preferences about reading differ for second readers and different "pairs" of readers work differently. Some like to see each piece, others prefer to see a complete draft. Individual arrangements should be made with your secondary advisor on the specific amount of contact to occur during the semester. Remember that both your primary and secondary advisors must sign off on your final product. It is essential that they be both be "kept in the loop" throughout the semester.

All students are required by the first (preferred) or second (mandatory) meeting to have developed a thesis question and named primary and secondary advisors who have agreed to supervise and assist in the completion of the assignments required for this class. Understand that this is the bare minimum for beginning the seminar. A form for this purpose, which must be turned into me, is included at the end of this syllabus.

A primary advisor can be drawn from Professors Jez, Kirlin, Shulock, Venezia and Wassmer. Professor Lascher, the Acting Dean, may take on a very small number of students. Acting Provost Charles Gossett has taken on an occasional thesis as well. A secondary advisor can be chosen from among this same group, part-time PPA instructors Detwiller and Booher, and other part and full-time professors and instructors at CSUS. In some cases you may work with retired PPA faculty.

You will need to stay on schedule, if you slip, you will go to the back of the line for your reader. In the case of at least one reader, slippage may result in you being directed to a new reader. Faculty will work to return the items in timely fashion but that is first dependent on you keeping to your agreed upon schedule.

Research Partner:

Each student will be paired with another who is registered in this class. This person will serve as a partner in their quest to finish the thesis. Besides their primary and secondary advisors, this partner will serve as a sounding board, confidant, and a third set of eyes to read what is written. This is meant to be a reciprocal relationship where your help will be equally rewarded by the help of another. Please secure this person's signature also on the sheet attached to syllabus.

Format of Class Meetings:

This course will meet 6 to no later than 8:50 p.m. on four nights throughout the semester. This is absolutely not a lecture-based course. All students are required to participate in these discussions and should come prepared to class each week with a summary of progress in the previous week(s), and questions/concerns that need to be addressed. Expect to be called on often to make such a report. We will also be joined by students who are "sitting in" a term ahead of completion and those who completed 500 by have not finished their thesis.

Assignments and Grading

Grades:

There are only two grades that can be obtained in this class: reasonable progress (rp) or no credit. I will ask your primary advisor what you have earned and assign that grade.

Reasonable progress means that you either finished your thesis this semester, or are capable of finishing over the break before the next semester, or, worst case, you have a minimum number of chapters turned in. Please talk to your primary advisor to find out what his/her expectation is. If you are done an RP will be converted to credit by the Graduate Studies office after you turn in your thesis as they post the final completion information.

If you do not receive a passing grade in 500 you may take it one more time. If you do not pass the course a second time you will be evicted from the University and have to reapply to the University in order to finish. Given the constraints on admissions, this would require you to compete directly with incoming students for a seat. We will not look favorably on these petitions. Please expect to finish the thesis the term you take 500.

Required Reading Material:

(1) *CSUS Guide For Thesis Format*, Latest Edition, Office of Research and Graduate Studies, CSUS, available free on web at <http://www.csus.edu/gradstudies/CurrentStudents/Thesis-Project-Dissertation/Templates-and-Guides.html> . This site changes near the beginning of the term so please check back regularly.

(2) *A Pocket Style Manual*, 2000, Diana Hacker, Third Edition, Bedford Books; available for purchase at bookstore or online. Most PPA students have already purchased this manual for an earlier class;

(3) Optional - *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*; 1986, Howard S. Becker, Chicago Press; available for purchase online.

Schedule:

Note that while specific assignments are listed throughout the semester, beyond the first two assignments, the order and number may be modified with the consent of your primary thesis advisor. In particular, students who complete a more traditional hypothesis driven thesis are

usually “done” with each chapter as it is signed off, especially with Professor Wassmer. Other students will have good working drafts that may still require modifying as they move along.

The agreed upon schedule is to be turned in at the second meeting (an example of such a schedule is given in the appendix). I recognize that particular students may have needs that are best met by modifying the general pattern set forth for completion of the master’s project.

Session 1 – September 9

Background and Goals

Process

[Review of PPA Department Human Subjects Guidelines](#)

Assignment Due: (1) one-page prospectus/memo defining your problem and explaining why it is important, who is affected, and the general scope of issue (see example offered in appendix- you will also be asked to make a two minute statement on your thesis question). If you are farther along in the process you may submit a complete working draft of your Introduction and Literature Review in lieu of (1) above.

(2) A draft or final completion of Thesis Question, Advisors’ and Research Partner’s Signatures Sheet (included here for you to fill out). Approvals can be gathered electronically (no signature needed), simply attach a paper copy so I have a complete record.

Session 2 – September 16

Assignment Due: (1) Five minute (max) presentation before class on thesis question, with one page outline of sections contained in your thesis, and proposed dates of completion (bring enough paper copies of outline and schedule for all – an example is given in the appendix to this syllabus).

Session 3 – October 14

As a class we will review the University thesis formatting requirements. The University now requires that students take a formatting course (done by attending this session) or complete the online class. If you do this in class you get a signoff sheet at the end.

This session will discuss final logistics for turning the thesis in and graduation. If you are slipping behind we will discuss next steps.

Assignment Due: Be prepared to give the class an update on your progress, schedule and any particular challenges you are having.

Session 4 – November 4

We will check in, work on any knotty problems, and discuss logistics for graduation.

Thesis Schedule

	Strongly encouraged	Department requirement	University requirement	Check off when completed
Advancement to candidacy			X	Before registration for PPA 500
Thesis question with signature of primary and secondary advisor and research partner		X		
Graduation application turned in by October 1			X	
Introduction and Literature/Background chapter	September 9			
Methodology/approach chapter	October 1			
University Formatting Workshop (in class October 14)			X	
Data/Findings chapter	November			
Complete <i>working</i> draft with conclusion	November 1			
Complete draft signed off by advisors	November 15			
Grad Studies Format evaluation signoff * November 12-15 and 18-22 by appt Dec 2-6 Walk in			X	
Final copy to Grad Studies office	December 6, 3pm		X	

*This is likely to be a two step turn in process. We will discuss in class. In addition, these dates are not yet finalized.

Appendix I: Prospectus Example

Prospectus for Thesis on Teenage Birthrates

Deborah Franklin

Working Title: Teen Birthrates in California: What Really Matters?

Major Advisor: Rob Wassmer

Secondary Advisor: Nancy Shulock

Why study teenage birthrates?

Over the last decade, the issue of teenage birthrates has received attention in the media, legislatures, and political speeches. An article on world population problems in a recent issue of *National Geographic* (2001) included the United States as an example of a nation with a worsening population problem, its teenage birthrate.

How large is the problem of teenage childbearing in the U.S? The teenage birthrate in the U.S. is five percent, which is five percent of teen girls aged 15 to 19 give birth each year. The U.S. has the highest teenage birthrate in the industrialized world. Since 1960, the teenage birthrate has tripled among unmarried females aged 15-19.

Teenage childbearing is expensive. Welfare, food stamps, and Medicaid expenditures for families begun by a teenage mother totaled \$37 billion in 1995. In 1996, The Robin Hood Foundation estimated that teenage parenthood in America cost taxpayers \$6.9 billion a year in increased costs for welfare and food stamps benefits, medical care, incarceration, and foster care. The 1996-97 California State budget included \$73 million in teen pregnancy prevention programs. Funding for prevention programs continues in this year's budget. Despite prevention efforts, in 1997 in California 59,851 births were to teenage mothers, a birthrate of 56.7 births per 1000 women aged 15-19.

One of the costs related to teenage childbearing is dropping out of high school. Hoffman, Foster, and Furstenberg examined the costs of teenage motherhood and found that teen mothers completed fewer years of education. Only 54% graduated from high school, but an estimated 71% would have graduated if they had delayed childbearing until they were 20 years old. Conversely, dropping out of high school has an effect on teenage childbearing. Leibowitz, Eisen, and Chow (1998) studied pregnant teens in Ventura County and reported that teens who reported higher grades in high school were more likely to choose abortion, and teens that had already dropped out of high school were more likely to give birth. Plotnick (2002) considered the attitudes of teens and its effect on decisions to abort, give birth before marriage, or give birth after marriage. Interestingly, the variables for educational expectation were significantly and positively related to both abortion and marriage before birth. The relationship between teen birthrates and high school dropout rates is both complicated and important to our understanding of teenage childbearing.

The success of efforts to lower the teenage birthrate depends on an understanding of the factors that influence the birthrate. While the teenage birthrate has been steadily dropping in California, it is still high enough to generate concern among policymakers and residents. In my research, I will look for some of the underlying factors that contribute to our state's teenage birthrate and then consider their implications for public policy.

The Question

Teenage Pregnancy and Birth in California: Trends and Characteristics provides an excellent overview of teen birthrates in California. It concluded that, in general, birthrates vary by race/ethnicity and poverty level. For my thesis, I am interested in other factors that may be related to teenage birthrates. My research for PPA 207 indicates that the high school dropout rates are an important factor. However, teenage birthrates and high school dropout rates have an endogenous relationship. For my thesis I plan to focus my efforts on finding the distinct factors related to each of those rates. The central question that I will be addressing is what cultural, economic, educational, and home and community environmental factors are related to the teenage birthrate. Another question that I will be addressing is what cultural, economic, educational, and home and community environmental factors are related to high school dropout rates. I also want to examine how teenage birthrates and dropout rates impact each other and the magnitude of one's impact on the other.

Methodology

Building on my PPA 207 paper, I will be using regression analysis of aggregate data at the county level as my primary research method. I plan to increase the variables in my original county birthrate variance regression analysis by including a variable for the rate of population change in each county. I will also include a variable for accessibility to reproductive health services. I also plan to use aggregate county level data and regression models to analyze factors related to high school dropout rates. From these multivariate regression models and the theory underlying the models, I hope to be able to draw inferences about the relationship between teenage birthrates and high school dropout rates.

Appendix II: Suggested Five Chapter Outline for Traditional PPA Thesis

Below is one way to think about the organization of Master's project in a traditional six-section format. You should work out the specific format of your thesis with your principal advisor. Ten to 12 pages would be the suggested lengths for each section.

Chapter 1: Introduction

What is the question you are investigating? In theory and application, why is this question important? Relate the topic to the public policy and/or administrative material you have learned in this program, cite general interest publications that raise the importance of this topic. Describe how the rest of your thesis/project will flow.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

What is already known about this issue? Review a select sample of academic literature, existing reports, and/or policy/administrative history of this issue. Reference the material you have been exposed to in the program. Conclude with a summary of what gaps in our understanding/knowledge of the topic your research will fill. Identify the specific variables involved in your study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

What is the method you will use to gather the facts to answer your research question? Include data collection and data analysis methods. Be specific and detailed.

Chapter 4: Results

Present your findings with an analysis. Save the major findings and conclusions for Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

Summarize what you have done in each of the previous chapters and then draw conclusions. What does your analysis say? What are the answers you have derived to your research questions? What surprised you? What could you not find? Any suggestions you could offer on how to do differently?

Appendix III: Suggested Outline for PPA "Project" thesis

A project thesis may look different than a traditional thesis. The information below is designed to give you an idea what probably needs to be included. Your particular project may have additional sections or chapters, it will depend on what your audience needs to know. You should work out the specific format of your thesis with your principal advisor. Ten to 12 pages would be the suggested lengths for each section.

Chapter 1: Introduction

What is this project trying to address? What is the genesis of the project? Who is the audience? What issue(s) are you investigating? Most project oriented theses have a clear practical application, what is it? And how will you be using more traditional theory and research to help inform the issue? Relate the topic to the public policy and/or administrative material you have learned in this program, cite general interest publications that raise the importance of this topic. Describe how the rest of your thesis/project will flow.

Chapter 2: What do we know and what am I adding -- a somewhat modified literature review and methodology section

What is driving the need for this project, what background information is important? What is already known about this issue? Review existing reports, and/or policy/administrative/political history of this issue. As you talk about how you're going to tackle the issue (your approach or methodology) you will likely be including some "theory" or framework. Make sure you talk about this literature as well. Reference the material you have been exposed to in the program as appropriate.

What is the method you will use to gather the facts to answer your research question? Include any data collection and data analysis methods. Be specific and detailed.

Chapter 3: Results/analysis/Your Work

Describe your work? What did you discover? Present your findings with an analysis. This should be readable! Remember to show your information/findings in multiple formats, "pictures, words and numbers". Tufte-ize your findings, may them a delight to read.

Chapter : Conclusions

Summarize what you have done in each of the previous chapters and then draw conclusions. What does your analysis say? What are the recommendations and/or implications of what you found? What surprised you? What could you not find? What else needs to be done by practitioners and researchers to help address this issue? Make sure you return to the big questions you raised at the beginning about why the issue needed to be addressed.

Appendix IV: Suggested Six Section Outline for Thesis Based On Cam Analysis

Below is another way to think about the organization of Master's project in a six-section format. You should work out the specific format of your thesis with your principal advisor. Ten pages would be the suggested lengths for each section.

Section 1: Define the Problem

- I. Specific problem
- II. Larger context and background
- III. Others' experiences
- IV. Literature review

Section 2: Environment

- I. Political environment and constraints
- II. Legal mandates and issues
- III. Economic factors
- IV. Social issues

Section 3: Alternatives

- I. Analyze causes of problem
- II. Define the variables inherent in alternatives
- III. Reduce and simplify number of alternatives

Section 4: Criteria

- I. Select and justify criteria for evaluating alternatives (e.g. cost/benefit, equity, political feasibility, accountability)
- II. Relative weighting of criteria
- III. Methodology

Section 5: Analysis of Alternatives

- I. Project outcomes of all alternatives
- II. Analyze outcomes in terms of criteria
- III. Summarize and contrast alternatives
- IV. Confront the trade-offs

Section 6: Recommendation and Conclusions

- I. Tailor recommendation to proper audience/clients
- II. Long-term versus short-term issues
- III. Pay attention to implementation

Thoughts from a recent alum...

Helpful:

1. Having the problem statement defined and signed off by both advisors on the first night of class
2. Having completed review of literature (though not necessarily having it written up)
3. Having thought through the entire research process (sampling, methodology, analysis)
4. Having developed a schedule of completion
5. Updating advisors frequently (about every other week) even if it is to tell them bad news
6. Once beginning writing process, just sitting down and writing whatever came into my head and not worrying about how it sounded, citation, etc.
7. Writing for social scientists (red book) - this for me because I was really nervous about sitting down and writing
8. Having good working relationship with advisors
9. If you are doing a survey, get the university paperwork going right away. Also I recommend a trial run to make sure you are going to get meaningful responses to the questions.
10. Getting the formatting right from the beginning. Changing formatting midway can really mess with your text and table alignment.
11. Have person other than (and before and after) your advisors proofread your thesis for clarity and grammar.

About the thesis completion process:

1. Pay the fees at the Student Financial Services Center (Lassen Hall) as soon as the student feels confident he/she will finish the thesis. That is just one less thing to do on the day of submitting the thesis.
2. Plan to go to the graduate studies thesis sign-off people at least twice (once with a final draft on regular paper, and once with the final draft on the pretty paper). Plan to spend a couple hours there each time.

3. Before going in for graduate studies thesis check, do use a ruler to check your margins on every page. Check the margins for the page numbers, text, and tables.
4. Coordinate availability with your advisors and the department chair (Rob) so that you can get all of your signatures on time and without running around to fifty different places.