PPA500: Culminating Experience

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Office hours: W & Th 4:30-6 pm and by appointment

Zoom Meetings	5-6 pm on January 26, March 9, April 13
Final Paper Submission	May 2 (tentative)
MPPA Showcase	May 13 (tentative)

Description & Objectives

This course will help you complete your culminating project by the end of the semester. To keep everyone on track, we will have three Sunday meetings throughout the semester. These meetings are interactive check-in sessions involving all presenting their progress and providing peer feedback. Thus, students are required to come prepared for each session with a 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. 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 critical and integrative thinking, practical application, and professional role.
- **Showcase your capabilities.** Demonstrating your learning is crucial for working professionals. PPA500 provides you with an opportunity to showcase what you can do for varied audiences.

Your culminating project is different from your final term papers. It should be developed gradually throughout the semester. Therefore, working closely with an advisor outside of group meetings is essential.

Course Outline and Assignments

There is one written assignment at the beginning of the semester. Please email me your research question with one or two sentences and the format of your project (e.g. policy/administrative report, academic paper, or career portfolio) by the end of Jan 25. If you plan to conduct interviews or data analysis, please provide anything available, such as which group you are considering interviewing, how to interview, the dataset you will use, or data collection status, etc. I understand that your plan can change as the semester goes on (or even after our first meeting), so do not worry about details or coherence. There is no required page length/format/or thoroughness for this assignment. You can use this assignment to prepare your presentation for our first meeting.

Then, review the artifacts you completed in your coursework and indicate any relevant concepts, theoretical frameworks, or analytical methods you would like to use for your project. If your artifacts do not completely fit your topic, you can bring them from previous literature.

You will prepare a five-minute presentation in each meeting that shows the progress of your project. What you will present is a bulleted list in the table below.

Date	Topic	Assignment
Zoom 01-26	° Present your research question in one or two sentences ° Specify whether you write a policy report, an academic paper, or a career portfolio ° Artifacts you will use (e.g., PPA term paper) ° (optional) If you plan to write a report, introduce any relevant theories that you are planning to use to discuss the problems in the literature review section <u>or</u> an analytical tool to draw its policy recommendations at the end. If you plan to write an empirical paper, introduce the dataset/key variables (e.g., CHIS data from PPA207)	Prepare a five-minute ppt slide presentation that introduces your topic; please bring any questions or suggestions regarding our schedule/meeting type, etc.
Zoom 03-09	° Present your work outline and summarize what you have done so far ° Summarize what will be done by the next Zoom meeting	Prepare a five-minute presentation that shows your progress
Zoom 04-13	° Summarize what you have completed so far ° Your plan by the final deadline	Prepare a five-minute presentation that shows your progress

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 an academic paper, consult your advisor beforehand.

- In your paper, include 1) a cover page containing your title, name, and graduation year/month and 2) an executive summary. Use one-inch margins, 12-point font, pagination, 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 more details, 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 in Project Showcase. You can see previous showcase at https://www.youtube.com/@GASPPA.

Grading

Only two grades can be obtained—reasonable progress or no credit. Reasonable progress means you make progress gradually throughout the semester.

Class Attendance

Please let me know in advance if you need to miss the session.

Further Guidelines for MPPA Culminating Project
(Attached to 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.

o   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

o 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.

o 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.

o 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.

o 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."