

PPD 561A: Policy Analysis Practicum
Sol Price School of Public Policy
University of Southern California
(1 unit course)

Instructors

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Course Description

This is the first part of the two-semester capstone course for the Master of Public Policy (MPP) degree. The Practicum integrates skills developed in the MPP program, engaging students in conducting policy research on behalf of a client in the community. Students work in groups to conduct policy research and produce a report for an organization or public official. The students will be assigned to one of a set of clients recruited by the instructors, and will refine the project in consultation with the client. Assignments will be made based on the fit between client needs and student skills and interests, as discussed below. *Students will not be permitted to move between projects following the initial assignments.*

PPD 561A (1 unit) is a workshop course that focuses on issue framing, project scoping and proposal development. The end product of the class will be a proposal for the project that is agreed upon by the team and the client. The course requires five meetings in class, regular team meetings with instructors, and regular interaction using Blackboard and Basecamp, a project management application. PPD 561B (3 units) involves policy research and analysis, and production of the final report and briefing.

Learning Objectives. PPD 561A requires students to apply the theoretical frameworks and technical skills learned in the program to scope out the issue concerning the assigned client, and to negotiate and plan a feasible policy analytic project. The specific objectives are:

- **Literature review, project scoping, and methodological design.** Review relevant published literature on the topic, and frame an actionable policy analysis proposal that is client-focused and methodologically rigorous.
- **Team management:** Students will develop a team management system and a work plan to support collaboration and interface with the client. This entails identifying team roles, establishing times for regular meetings, and a detailed plan and timeline for production of intermediate products and deliverables. *Regular team meetings and periodic team meetings with the instructor are requirements of this class.*
- **Client relations:** The groups will also meet with the client early in the semester and identify how they will maintain communication during both 561A & B. Teams need to keep the client apprised of their progress, and must be respectful of the organizational and political environment within which the client operates.

Recruitment of Clients and Assignment to Teams

The recruitment of clients and assignment of students to project teams mirrors how project assignment might proceed in a consulting organization or governmental evaluation agency. The instructors, acting in effect as the “principals,” are responsible for initial project identification. On behalf of the class, the instructors recruit clients and identify in broad terms the project objectives and methodology. There is an attempt to identify a range of project opportunities within different sectors (private/public/nonprofit), with differing methodological approaches, and with attention to an array of substantive areas.

Students are surveyed in advance of the class as to their interests and skill levels. Also, submitting a current resume is a requirement of the class. The projects will be posted prior to the commencement of class, and students will be provided an opportunity to rank-order their top five project preferences. Project assignments will be made by the instructor, who will assemble teams with attention to student preferences, skills and specialization areas, and workability within the team.

Once project assignments are made, students are expected to work actively with the team and the client. Should project workability or client-side issues arise, please contact the instructors as soon as possible. We will work out necessary adaptations, with the goal of maintaining the integrity of the project and the project team. In extreme circumstances when attempts to address workability issues are unsuccessful, the instructors reserve the right to reorganize a team, remove team members, and/or recruit a new client in a way that will allow the team and project to proceed as well as possible.

Course Requirements and Expectations

1. *Resume review and revision.* All members of the class must submit a resume to Turnitin and upload it to Basecamp by August 28. Following review by instructors, the resumes will be provided to the client. Students with unacceptable resumes will be referred to Career Services for assistance in revising them. Five percent of the class grade will be based on timely resume submission.
2. *Literature review/issue memos.* All individuals in each group are required to inform themselves on the broader intellectual, political, and organizational context of the issue through a review of pertinent published literature (academic studies, government reports, etc.) Each group member will write a 2-to-3-page (single-spaced) literature review memo to the group (graded by instructors) that summarizes his or her independent thoughts on the issue. Groups should work together to “parse out” their understanding of the issue in a manner that permits the individual issue review memos to speak to the group project as a whole. Twenty percent of the grade will be based on this memo.
3. *Project contributions on Basecamp.* Each individual in the group will be graded based on their contribution of documents and completion of tasks as documented on Basecamp, a project management application that will be established for each team. The team will establish a work plan and members of the team will be responsible for completing tasks, forwarding client communications, uploading and properly archiving research documents, and uploading interview questions and notes from at least one expert interview (in person or by telephone). Each individual will also upload the original writing that they contribute to development of the draft proposal. Fifteen percent of the grade will be based on a survey of individual Basecamp postings, assessed three times during the course of the class (weeks 5, 10, 15).

4. *Participation and project management.* Students are required to meet regularly as a group, and to arrange meetings as required at the convenience of the client. The students will be expected to function professionally in managing the project and in all meetings with the client. They are also expected to develop internal procedures and systems for project management, documented on Basecamp, and to respond in a proactive and constructive manner to unanticipated problems and challenges that arise in the process of getting the work done. All team members are expected to contribute fully to meetings and completion of work on the project.

There will be two assessments of participation and project management, each worth five percent of the grade. First, each member of the group will be evaluated by fellow group members with respect to their contributions to group process, including for example leadership, communications skills, consistency in attending meetings and submitting materials on deadline, creativity of ideas, etc. Second, each team member will be asked to reflect on the management of the project as a whole, and to suggest ways to improve systems for project management in the Spring semester.

5. *Project proposal.* Each team will prepare a 10-to-12-page (single-spaced) prospectus, for approval by the client and instructor. This will include a brief issue statement/literature review, researchable questions, research methodology including design matrix, and work plan for the second semester. Students will “define” the problem from the perspective of the client and with consideration of public values such as efficiency and equity, scope a project that can be completed with the resources available (time and team skills), develop the appropriate research design, and identify data needs and analytic frameworks. This will inevitably require narrowing and refining of the issue or problem focus of the project. In so doing, all team members must complete at least one expert interview in addition to the literature review.

The instructors will review and critique a draft prior to submission to the client, and the score will be weighted between the individual and final versions (see Table 1, below). The methodology may employ quantitative methods (statistical analysis; cost-benefit analysis; operations research) and/or qualitative methods (interviewing; focus groups; field observation; archival research). *Each group member must contribute to the draft, and must upload their draft section to Basecamp. The instructor may reduce an individual grade on the team proposal if a student cannot substantiate their specific contribution to the project or if the contribution is deemed inadequate.*

6. *Human subjects review.* All student groups are required to determine whether federal regulations require human subjects review through the USC Institutional Review Board (IRB). If required, they will submit required material to the IRB prior to conducting research.
6. *Faculty and TA consultation.* Throughout the process, the instructor and teaching assistant will be available to troubleshoot issues. *Each group will be required to meet with their instructor at least twice during the semester, as indicated in the course schedule.* The instructors will also provide regular feedback on interim products to ensure quality deliverables. They ordinarily will not, however, direct the research unless groups experience severe workability issues.

Table 1: Grade weight by assignment -- Assignments are due by 11:59pm on due date

Assignment	Length	Due date	Grade weight
<i>Resume (ind)</i>	1-2 pp snl	8/28	5%
<i>Issue lit review memo (ind)</i>	2-3 pp. snl	10/2	20
<i>Basecamp contributions (ind)</i>	Various	10/26; 11/30	10
<i>Draft proposal (grp)</i>	8-10 pp snl	11/20	20
<i>Final proposal (grp)</i>	10-12 pp snl	12/14	35
<i>Peer and project review</i>	Varied	11/30; 12/09	10%
			100%

Form and Style. All products should be single-spaced, with 12-point type and one-inch margins. Page lengths do not include attachments such as appendices, references, or tables/charts. All assignments must be written in plain, concise prose, as described in Strunk and White's Elements of Style. The client also will have the opportunity to provide expectations with regard to form and style.

Submission policies. All assignments must be submitted in a timely manner to Turnitin and uploaded to Basecamp. For individual projects, the file naming protocol is **lastname_assignment** (e.g., musso_resume). For group work, the file naming protocol is **group name_assignment** (e.g., "LA_Mayor_predraft). The instructors may grade down assignments that are submitted incorrectly or require renaming.

Academic integrity: Students should maintain strict adherence to standards of academic integrity, as described in SCampus (<http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/>). In particular, the University recommends strict sanctions for plagiarism: defined below:

Figure 1: SCAMPUS Section 11.11 Plagiarism

- A. The submission of material authored by another person but represented as the student's own work, whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near-verbatim form.
 - B. The submission of material subjected to editorial revision by another person that results in substantive changes in content or major alteration of writing style.
 - C. Improper acknowledgment of sources in essays or papers.
- Note:** Culpability is not diminished when plagiarism occurs in drafts that are not the final version. Also, if any material is prepared or submitted by another person on the student's behalf, the student is expected to proofread the results and is responsible for all particulars of the final draft.

*Source: SCampus University Governance;
<http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/governance/gov05.html>*

All material referenced within drafts and reports must be properly cited, including identification of author, title, publication, institutional affiliation or press, date, and URL if found online. If you have any questions about academic integrity or citation standards, please ask in advance.

Policy on late and missing assignments: Please inform the TA and instructor in advance if you must miss a deadline. Late documents may be graded down 10 percent per day.

Syllabus revision. The instructors will regularly assess progress and elicit student feedback regarding the course. If necessary, the syllabus may be revised to meet the specific needs of the class, including the potential extension of deadlines if necessary.

Academic accommodations. Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification

for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to one of the professors (or to the TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open early 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Human Subjects Compliance and Review: Students are expected to pursue their research ethically and in compliance with the university's codes regarding human subject protections. The University Park Institutional Review Board is the review and compliance body formed to protect human subjects in biomedical and social science. It is empowered to review all research proposals, funded or not, which are conducted by the faculty, staff, graduate or undergraduate students which involve the use of human subjects. Human subject means a living individual about whom an investigator conducting research obtains (a) data through intervention or interaction with the individual; or (b) identifiable private information. See the full description of the IRB at <http://www.usc.edu/admin/provost/irb/>. The mission of the Office of Compliance is accessed at <http://www.usc.edu/admin/compliance/mission.html>.

Project teams that collect primary data *about human subjects* (e.g., through interviewing, focus groups, or surveys) will need to file appropriate paperwork with the USC Institutional Review Board. This will be discussed in more detail in class. More information on Institutional Review Board review procedures may be accessed at the federal Health and Human Services website. Several chapters from the *Institutional Review Board Guidebook* posted there may be of specific interest: http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/irb/irb_chapter1.htm.

Readings

Readings that are required in advance of class meetings are identified in the course schedule and available in ARES, the library's electronic reserve. Additional texts on reserve explore methodological frameworks and dimensions of the consultant's experience. The instructors may suggest other readings as necessary for the development of project methods. Students will also be responsible for reading the literature identified by the student team in conducting research related to the project.

Reference Books

The following books are valuable resources that contain more in-depth discussion of professional skills and methodological considerations relevant to project planning. All are available through the university library system and we can make some chapters or readings available on the class web site.

Leonard Bickman and Debra J. Rog, 2009. *The SAGE Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. (Available in e-book from USC Library)

Peter Block, 2011. *Flawless Consulting: A Guide to Getting Your Expertise Used*. Pfeffer (available in E-book from USC Library).

John Creswell, 2014. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches 4th ed.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. (NB: print only; place on reserve)

Chava Frankfort-Nachmias and David Nachmias, 2008. *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*. New York: Worth Publishers. (NB: print only; would need to recall and place on reserve)

Neil J. Salkind, 2010. *Encyclopedia of Research Design* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. (Online)

C.F. Nachmias and Nachmias, D. (2000). "Ethics in Social Science Research" (Ch. 4) and "Writing Research Reports" (Appendix B) in Chava Frankfort-Nachmias and David Nachmias, *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, Worth Publishers

Robert K. Yin., 2013. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods 5th ed.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Course Schedule:

Week 1: Preview Course Requirements; project assignments *Aug. 24*

- Submit your resume via Blackboard turnitin, no later than August 28th (per course requirements)
- Meet with your project team:
 - Self-introductions and interests;
 - Conduct basic background research on the client organization;
 - Conduct preliminary research on issues described in the one-page project description;
 - Prepare a 2-3 overview description of the project to present by one member of the team to the class in week 2.

Resume due to Turnitin August 28

Week 2: Class Meeting: Prepping the Client Meeting *Aug. 31*

- Preparing for the first client meeting
- Review of semi-structured interview techniques
- Interview training by Career Services

Required readings:

- Beth L. Leech, “[Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructured Interviews](#).” PS: Political Science and Politics, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Dec., 2002), 665-668. (Available on ARES)
- Dean Hammer and Aaron Wildavsky (1983). “The Open-Ended, Semi-Structured Interview: An (Almost) Operational Guide, Ch. 5 in *Wildavsky, Craftways*. Transaction Publishers. (Available on ARES)
- Michael Mintrom, “Facilitating Meetings,” Ch. 7 in *People Skills for Policy Analysts*, Georgetown University Press, 2003

Recommended:

- Tammy Adams, Janet A Means, Michael Spivey. The project meeting facilitator [electronic resource]: facilitation skills to make the most of project meetings. Jossey-Bass, 2015. Available online through ARES; available used for ~\$17 through Amazon Prime.

Weeks 3-4: Teams meet with client *Sep. 7, 14*

- Upload client meeting agenda and post-meeting notes to Basecamp

Week 5: Class Meeting: Project/Team Management; Literature Review *Sep. 21*

- Team project planning; role designation, and work plan development;
- Team dynamics and workability
- Overview of literature review/issue diagnosis assignment

Required readings:

- George Frederickson, “Toward a Theory of the Public in Public Administration,” *Administration and Society*, 22:4, 395-417, 1991.

- Terry Moore, "Managing Planning Projects: A Practical Guide. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 1991.
- Michael Mintrom, "Conflict Management," Ch. 9 in *People Skills for Policy Analysts*.

Issue Lit Review Memos due to Turnitin October 2

Weeks 6-7: Teams meet with instructor by appointment *Sep. 28, Oct. 5*

Week 8: Class Meeting: Researchable Questions and Design Matrix *Oct. 12*

- Feedback on issue diagnosis/literature review
- Researchable questions;
- Design matrix

Required reading:

- Government Accountability Office, *Designing Evaluations, 2012 Revision*. Available online at <http://www.gao.gov/assets/590/588146.pdf> (Note: The intellectual approach taken by GAO to program evaluation can be extended more generally to applied policy research of all kinds. Focus in particular on Chapter 2, "Defining an Evaluation's Scope," and Chapter 3, "The Process of Selecting an Evaluation Design," which describes the design matrix tool.)

Weeks 9-10: Team meetings and individual contributions to Basecamp *Oct. 19, 26*

Week 11: Class Meeting: Troubleshooting and Alumni Panel *Nov. 2*

- Round-robin project update
- Alumni panel discussing troubleshooting and approaches to project management

Weeks 12-13: Teams meet with instructor by appointment *Nov. 9, 16*

Draft Proposal due to Turnitin November 20

Week 14: Thanksgiving Week *Nov. 23*

Week 15: Class Meeting: IRB *Nov. 30*

- Presentation from University Park IRB

Required reading:

- USC Office for the Protection of Research Subjects, "Student Handbook: Making Sense of Human Subjects Research. Available online at <https://opr.s.usc.edu/files/2013/04/Student-Handbook-4.1.13.pdf>

Final Proposal due to Turnitin December 14