

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

Room: Champions A and B [2nd Floor of USC Radisson]

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 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, client, and instructor. The course requires five meetings in class, regular team meetings with instructors, and regular interaction using Blackboard and Basecamp, a project management application.

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 ten ~~top five~~ project preferences. Project assignments will be made by the instructors, 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

Resume review and revision. All members of the class must submit a brief 1-2 page resume to Turnitin and upload it to Basecamp by midnight of August 19. 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.

Issue Diagnosis and Literature review memo. All members of a project team 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 team member must write a 2-3 page (single-spaced) issue diagnosis and literature review memo, with 3 components, that is sent to the group and instructor (and graded by instructor). Component #1 is a summary of each individual’s independent thoughts on the issue. Component #2 requires the team to work together to “parse out” their understanding of the issue and agree on the main focus for each member in the forthcoming team research and report writing. The second section of the literature review (maximum of ½ half page) needs to identify the “area of focus” the individual will be focusing on as part of the team. Component #3 is an appendix (no more than 1-page summary of an interview with someone knowledgeable about the team topic, excluding USC faculty and staff). Twenty-five percent of the grade will be based on this memo.

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. Five percent (5%) 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).

Participation and project management. Teams are to meet regularly as a group, and to arrange regular meetings with the client at the convenience of the client. Everyone is expected to act professionally in managing the project and in all client meetings. The team must develop internal procedures and systems for project management, documented on Basecamp. It must respond in a proactive and constructive manner to unanticipated challenges and 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 5% 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.

Project proposal. Each member of a team must contribute to the preparation of the 8-10 page (single-spaced) completed draft and final 10-12 page project proposal, for approval by the client and instructor. This will include a brief issue statement/literature review, researchable questions, methodology, plus a 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. The methodology may employ quantitative methods (statistical analysis; cost-benefit analysis; operations research) and/or qualitative methods (interviewing; focus groups; field observation; archival research). Both the draft and final proposal will be scored (see Table 1, below).

Proposal submission process. The first step is submission of the draft for review and critique by the instructor, through turnitin in Blackboard. *The draft should not be submitted to the client unless specifically requested by the client and, in that case not until the instructor provides comments on the draft.* The final version of the proposal is to be submitted for scoring and comments to the instructor, through turnitin, and to the client, on or before the dates indicated below (see Table 1).

Faculty and TA consultation. *Each team is required to meet with their instructor as indicated in the course schedule.* The instructor will provide 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 5:00pm on due date unless otherwise indicated.

Assignment	Length	Due date	Grade weight
<i>Resume (ind)</i>	1-2 pp snl	8/19 (midnight)	5%
<i>Issue diagnosis & lit. review memo (ind)</i>	2-3 pp. snl	10/5	25
<i>Basecamp contributions (ind)</i>	various	Week 5,10,15	5
<i>Draft proposal (grp)</i>	8-10 pp snl	11/16	15
<i>Final proposal (grp)</i>	10-12 pp snl	12/10	40
<i>Peer and project review</i>	varied	12/11	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.

Copyright and Images Guidelines. See: USC Libraries, Research Guidelines for Public Administration and Policy, at: <http://libguides.usc.edu/c.php?g=234989&p=5325286>

Submission policies. All assignments must be formally submitted in a timely manner through turnitin (plus uploaded to Basecamp). Documents must be submitted in **WORD** format, using the following naming protocols: For individual projects, the file naming protocol is **lastname_assignment** (e.g., jones_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.

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.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call
engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following

protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421

studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

IRB Compliance and Review

PPD561 project teams are not routinely required to submit an application for human subjects review to the USC Institutional Review Board (IRB). This is based on the premise that most projects deal with public policy issues and do not directly contact vulnerable populations (as defined in the Federal Regulations); most do not qualify as generalizable research (as defined in Federal Regulations), and; most client oriented projects do not qualify under Federal Regulations*. It is the responsibility of the project team in consultation with the instructor of 561 to bring to the attention of IRB any project related research activity that may require an IRB assessment and review. Presumably, this determination will be made during preparation of the

research proposal in 561A. All MPP students need to be familiar with the guidelines in human subjects research as a component of their professional training and are encouraged to go through the human subjects on-line training provided by USC. The training can be found at (www.citiprogram.org).

*From 45 CFR 46.102, The Federal Regulations on Human Subjects Research. Human Subject: A living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or identifiable private information. Research: A systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Team Meetings and assignment - No in-class meeting *Aug. 20*

- All students must submit a 1-2 page brief resume via turnitin, no later than August 19th (see course requirements)
- Meet with your project team (team assignment notification will sent via e-mail on Aug. 2^{1st}):
 - 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 5 minute overview description of the team project to present by a member of the team to the class on Wk. 2

Resume due via Turnitin August 19th, by 11:59pm
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Week 2: Class Meeting #1: Project Presentations and Prepping the Client Meeting *Aug. 27*

- Presentation of team projects (see Wk.1)
- Preparing for the first client meeting
- Basecamp

Required reading:

- 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 together and by appointment with instructor and client *Sept. 3 & 10*
Reminder: Upload client meeting agenda and post-meeting notes to Basecamp

Week 5: Class Meeting #2: Project/Team Management and Research Design *Sept. 17*

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

Required readings:

- 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*.

Weeks 6-7: Teams meet with instructor by appointment and as a group

Sept. 24 & Oct. 1

Issue Diagnosis and Lit Review Memos due via Turnitin October 5, by 5:00pm

Week 8: Class Meeting #3: Developing a Narrative and Criteria/ Selection Methodology Oct. 8

- Developing a client-oriented project narrative (e.g., a “logic-model”)
- Focus literature review on researchable questions
- Aligning data collection needs with the narrative
- Aligning data needs and determining research methodology

Required Reading:

- tba
- 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 with instructors and individual contributions to Basecamp Oct. 15 & 22

Week 11: Class Meeting #4: Interviewing Techniques and Approaches Oct. 29

- Semi-structured interviewing
- Class exercise

Required reading:

- 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)

Weeks 12-13: Teams meet with instructor by appointment and as a group

Nov. 5 & 12

Draft Proposal due to Turnitin November 16, by 5:00pm
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Week 14: Thanksgiving Week

Nov. 19

Week 15: Class Meeting #5: Presentation of and “Backward Mapping” the Project Proposal
Nov. 26

- Team presentation of project proposal (a) overall, and (b) with specific focus on methods of analysis being employed (10 minutes, followed by Q and A)
- Backward mapping exercise

Final Proposal due via Turnitin, Dec. 10, by 5:00pm
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Peer Evaluation and Team Management memo due via turnitin, Dec. 11, by 5:00pm
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