

**MPA GUIDELINES FOR PAD 5361: ADVANCED
SEMINAR IN PUBLIC POLICY AND MANAGEMENT
November 13, 2009**

1. Purpose

The *Advanced Seminar in Public Policy and Management*, also known as the capstone course, is designed to provide students with the opportunity to integrate and synthesize what they have learned during the entire MPA course of study. It also provides a process and structure for SPA faculty to determine whether MPA graduates have attained the goals of the MPA program: knowledge of public administration or nonprofit theory, research, and practice; critical thinking skills; and written and oral communication skills. The advanced seminar project requires students to demonstrate knowledge of the concepts and principles conveyed in the MPA curriculum and to apply that knowledge to study a problem confronted by a public or nonprofit sector agency. The written and oral products of this seminar provide tangible evidence of a degree candidate's qualifications and expertise.

In the advanced seminar course, students undertake a client-based project. This project is intended to meet the information needs of a client or agency while also demonstrating and using knowledge and skills students have obtained in the MPA program.

A client-based project must:

- be undertaken for a client who is affiliated with a public or non-profit agency or organization;
- be of significance and practical use to the client organization; and
- be based on scholarly literature in public administration or nonprofit management.

To illustrate, a project may concern a management issue, such as an aspect of human resources management, financial analysis, or reorganization, or a policy or program issue, for example, an evaluation of an agency program, the planning and development of a new program, or the modification of an existing program.

2. Prerequisites

- a. The Advanced Seminar course should be taken in the student's last semester of classes before completing the MPA, though students will be oriented to the advanced seminar and identify their client and topic prior to the beginning of the semester;
- b. Although a student may take another elective at the same time as 5361, taking more than one additional course is strongly discouraged because of the work required in the advanced seminar;
- c. All *core* courses should have been completed before taking the Advanced Seminar course. Under exceptional circumstances a student may request that the instructor allow

one final core course to be taken concurrently with 5361. Since the advanced seminar project generally includes a research component, that course may not be PAD 5003: Research and Analytic Methods. If a core course is taken concurrently with PAD 5361, the advanced seminar project must not concern an issue addressed in the concurrent core course.

3. Selecting a Project

Students may find a client in many ways. The most common routes are these:

- SPA keeps a list of potential clients and their projects for students to contact;
- Students may approach an agency or contact person, meet with them and describe the advanced seminar course, and determine if the agency and/or contact person has a project or problem they would like the student to address.

Client-based projects may **NOT** be conducted as part of ongoing work responsibilities; however, students may conduct a project for an organization that employs them if that project is outside of their official responsibilities.

Students completing a concentration must pursue a project that is related to their concentration area. Further, their second reader must be a faculty member in the area of the concentration.

4. Course Format and Committee

The advanced seminar course is guided by a primary instructor. That instructor's role is to guide the student in selecting a project and specifying its scope, to assist the student as needed in conducting the project, and to provide extensive feedback to the student on various drafts of the project. In order to provide students with the individual attention needed, advanced seminar courses are restricted to no more than 18 students per class. Students may be moved to different sections to accommodate this class size requirement.

Work under the Advanced Seminar is guided by a committee comprised of three persons: the first reader (course instructor), a second reader (SPA faculty member), and a third reader (client or substantive expert). All three readers must ultimately approve the project prospectus. All will help the student with the project and will evaluate the final report and presentation, though the first reader serves as the student's primary guide.

The Second Reader

The second reader should be a rostered SPA faculty member or program director who is not listed as an instructor of record for PAD 5361 for that term. If a student has declared a concentration, the first or second reader must be a faculty member from that concentration area.

If a full-time faculty member with subject-matter expertise is not available, students may select a SPA adjunct faculty member with subject-matter expertise in the area of the project with the approval of the primary instructor. On the UCCS campus, the second reader can be a CU faculty member outside of SPA.

Second readers should be selected because they have expertise in the content area of the project. Students should consult with them early in the process to get recommendations for references to form the foundation of the client-based project and/or suggestions concerning target journals and references for research projects.

The Third Reader

The third reader is the client, i.e., the representative of the organization for which you are conducting the project.

Role of Readers

While the first reader will have the primary responsibility for supervising the student's project, the second and third readers have responsibility for: (1) approving the student's project prospectus, (2) commenting on project drafts and approving the final project report, (3) attending and participating in the oral presentation of the project, and (4) evaluating the student's work. Additionally, the third reader serves to link the student with the client organization and reports on the utility and professionalism of the student's work for and with the organization.

The first reader determines the student's grade, but will seek input from other readers to determine the final grade. (See attached rubric used by all readers to assess the project.)

5. Steps to the Project

No incompletes

The student must be able to complete the selected project by the end of the semester. An incomplete grade will be issued only under *very* exceptional circumstances.

Orientation

All students are required to participate in the orientation session for 5361 the semester before they plan to enroll. These sessions normally occur about one month before the end of the previous semester. Orientation information will be sent to students taking the online degree and the instructor for the online course will be available to answer their questions. All students who are eligible for taking the advanced seminar are contacted by the student services staff to attend or participate in this orientation.

The orientation prepares students to identify a project and client, as appropriate, and to develop a prospectus in preparation for the beginning of the course.

Preparing for the Beginning of Class

The orientation provides students with information about how to begin their projects. Before the beginning of the semester, students must identify a client and define their topic for the client. Students are encouraged to contact the person who is likely to be their professor for the advanced seminar to let him or her know of their topic and receive assistance in focusing the topic. Students are also encouraged to contact potential second and/or third readers during this time to get advice on a focus and references to explore. *The prospectus for the project is generally due the second week of the semester, so students must undertake some work before the semester begins to be able to complete the prospectus and begin the project.*

Prospectus: Week Two

Students will submit a prospectus which describes the goals of their project and the specific questions they hope to answer, and identifies the client and agency for which the project will be conducted. Finally, the prospectus names the faculty member(s) and client who have agreed to serve as second and third readers. Individual instructors in the advanced seminar may have additional, or slight variations, on their requirements for the prospectus.

Instructors may advise students who have not submitted an acceptable proposal to drop the course. This action must be taken before the official add-drop date, so students can drop the course without penalty. Students who are told to drop the course and to re-enroll the next semester will be given specific feedback and instructions from the primary instructor to allow them to begin the advanced seminar more productively the following semester.

Drafts

The advanced seminar report is unlike a traditional term paper in many ways. One way in which it differs is that students submit several drafts and revise those drafts, often extensively, based on feedback from their primary instructor and other readers. The primary instructor will provide students with their expectations and due dates for drafts in their section. Typically, however, students submit at least two drafts with one coming mid-way through the course and constituting the first part of the paper.

Students should check with their second and third readers at each draft to learn whether they prefer to receive the draft *after* the primary instructor has made suggestions and the student has revised or to receive it at the same time as the primary instructor. Some faculty members prefer to receive the paper after the primary instructor has provided feedback concerning the organization and substance of the paper. However, this delay can require them to read the paper quickly and get feedback to the student. On final drafts, the timeline can become particularly tight, so the student should work closely with the primary faculty member and communicate with second and third readers to establish a time frame for this stage.

Papers should be no longer than 25 double-spaced pages, excluding references, attachments, and figures. Instructors may provide more specific guidelines.

Final Report

Having received feedback from all readers, students should revise their final draft and distribute it to all readers at least one week before the oral presentation. In some cases, instructors may choose to have reports completed after the oral presentation based on feedback from the oral conference. Students will learn the specific details of due dates from their individual instructor's syllabus.

Oral Presentation

Students are expected to make a professional oral presentation, including supportive visual materials such as PowerPoint, overheads, or handouts. Oral presentation sessions typically last around one hour, though the actual presentation is limited to 15 minutes. Since readers have read the paper, the student may choose to focus on particular issues of interest or to summarize key points. The remainder of the hour is used for questions and discussion. Students are encouraged to practice the presentation to ensure they are organized and are able to convey all the information they desire within the 15 minute time limit. Oral presentations are a part of the student's final grade.

To schedule the presentation, students should select 3-5 potential dates and times and send them electronically to all readers to identify a time when all can participate. Second and third readers are required to be in attendance, but may participate electronically if circumstances prohibit their actual presence. Once a date and time are identified, students should contact the Student Services staff to obtain a room and any equipment for the presentation and notify the readers of the location. Students who live outside the Denver metro area will arrange an oral presentation making use of software or telecommunications technology. (Distance students may, and occasionally do, choose to come to Denver for the final presentation, but that is not required.)

6. Other Key Issues

Grounding the Project in the Scholarly Public Administration Literature

All advanced seminar projects include a review of the scholarly literature relevant to the project. The actions undertaken in the project should be grounded in the scholarly literature. It is expected that the student will have reviewed prominent refereed journals in the field and relevant to the chosen project, such as *Public Administration Review*, *American Review of Public Administration*, *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, *Public Performance & Management Review*, *Public Integrity, Administration & Society*, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *Public Budgeting and Finance*, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *Academy of Management Review*, and *International Journal of Public Management*.

Collecting and Analyzing Information

It is expected that the student will support project conclusions with evidence from qualitative or quantitative data. Students may use secondary data or generate primary data.

At this time, the UCD Human Subjects Research Committee Institutional Review Board (HSRC/IRB) has concluded that projects intended for use within an organization do not require their review. However, if a student is collecting original data from a group typically considered as a protected class by IRBs, the faculty member will review the project to insure human subject protections are being considered.

On the Colorado Springs campus, IRB approval may be required if any research data are collected from people. Students on that campus should consult their instructor to determine if IRB approval is needed.

Writing and Format

The advanced seminar report demonstrates a student's ability to communicate information, including scholarly information, in a professional manner. As noted above, students will complete several drafts and should anticipate substantive work on revisions at each stage. Students are required to use a standard writing format such as APA or Chicago styles.

Supplemental Documentation

All projects, regardless of the type, must draw upon at least three courses the student has completed in the MPA program. In addition to the project report, students will submit a brief document that describes how the knowledge and skills gained from the designated MPA courses were used to complete the project. At least one of these three courses must be a core course, and, if the student is completing a concentration, at least one must be a concentration course.

Project Assessment

The faculty of SPA have developed a rubric to describe expectations for advanced seminar projects. This rubric is based on the four goals of the MPA program: Students will have knowledge of public administration or nonprofit theory, research, and practices; good critical thinking skills; and professional skills to communicate orally and in writing. For each goal, we have developed indicators of proficient performance. Students may use these indicators to guide their own work. (Note the descriptions of various levels of performance are *indicators* of that level. The nature of advanced seminar projects differs, and not all projects will lend themselves to each descriptor. Nevertheless, these descriptors of levels of performance give students, and readers, a sense for SPA faculty's expectations regarding performance in each area.)

Readers will use a rubric to report on their judgment of the student's performance in each relevant area. The primary instructor will, then, determine the grade based on readers' feedback.

University of Colorado Denver
School of Public Affairs
PAD 5361: Advanced Seminar in Public Policy and Management

Reader/Assessor: _____

Instructor: _____

Student: _____

Title of advanced seminar paper: _____

Instructions: Please use the attached rubric to describe the performance of the student whose project you have read. Students have received the rubric and are aware of the standards. Your use of it will help us to more consistently describe and judge students' performance. Your ratings are used both to help determine individual student's grades and, in the aggregate, for us to judge the success of our MPA program in achieving desired outcomes in students.

- The attached rubric was developed around the four goals of our MPA program: knowledge of literature and theory in public administration or nonprofit management, effective oral and written communication, and critical thinking skills.
- Under each goal, we delineate three levels of performance: below proficient, proficient, and above proficient. The proficient level defines our expectations of a student in this capstone course.
- Under each level, we list some aspects of performance that are *illustrative* of a student at this level. Read these aspects to get a *sense* for what we mean by each level. You do *not* need to rate the student on each aspects listed. Instead, your task is to review the descriptions under each level and *select* the level that you feel best reflects an individual student's performance.
- Then, use this sheet to return your ratings and comments to the primary instructor. In the blank beside each goal, indicate whether the student's performance was below proficient, proficient, or above proficient. We encourage you to add comments to explain or discuss your judgment.

Assessment Goal:

1. The student's demonstration of knowledge of public administration or nonprofit research, theory, and practice.

Level: _____

Comments:

2. The student's demonstration of critical thinking skills.

Level: _____

Comments:

3. The student's demonstration of written communication skills.

Level: _____

Comments:

4. The student's demonstration of oral communication skills.

Level: _____

Comments:

Rubric for PAD 5361 Advanced Seminar in SPA

	Below Proficient	Proficient	Above Proficient
Knowledge of public administration, or non-profit theory, research, and practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *The student demonstrates little knowledge of scholarly literature relevant to the subject. *Scholarly references are not cited *Relevance of references to project is unclear *Theory and research from public administration or non-profit management are used incorrectly or insufficiently to guide the project and/or draw conclusions; *The student is unable to find relevant scholarly literature in the Public Affairs or Nonprofit field to help shape the project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *The student cites at least five scholarly articles or books relevant to the conduct of the project *The student describes the relevant theory, research, and/or practice in the area of his or her project in an informed, knowledgeable manner. *The student presents relevant theory, research, and practice and applies it correctly to the project being conducted. *In conducting the project, the student makes use of the scholarly literature to guide his or her actions. 	<p>The student meets the criteria for proficient <i>and</i> two or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Identifies literature that is very pertinent and informative for conducting the project; *Demonstrates a sophisticated knowledge of the Public Affairs research literature; *Makes innovative applications of the literature to the project in question

Note: The characteristics listed under each level are intended to be illustrative of student performance at that level. Advanced seminar projects and topics differ. Students do not need to achieve each bullet listed in order to be judged at that level.

	Below Proficient	Proficient	Above Proficient
Critical Thinking Skills	<p>One or more of the following problems are evidenced:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Student fails to understand or clearly define the problem presented by the client and/or the state of the research; *Student selects inappropriate methods to collect information or uses methods incorrectly; *Student arrives at conclusions not supported by the data; * Student is unable to understand key theories or research relevant to the problem; * Student is unable to locate scholarly articles relevant to the problem. * Paper reveals biases and is not balanced; student is not open to seeing both, or many, sides of the issues addressed. 	<p>The student is able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Clearly describe the problem to be studied; * Identify relevant scholarly literature and summarize the key points from this literature that are relevant to the proposed project; *Describe contrasting positions of scholars and practitioners in the areas of concern and discuss strengths and weaknesses of these positions; *Select and implement appropriate methods for collecting information to address the problem; *Correctly and appropriately interpret the information collected; *Base results and conclusions on information obtained, not prior opinions; * Develop products and conclusions appropriate for the client and his or her organization or the selected research venue; *Develop recommendations and conclusions that are perceived as useful by the client . 	<p>The student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Identifies new, innovative approaches to studying or addressing the problem of interest; *Makes recommendations that have a high probability of improving the agency's or scholars' ability to serve the public good. * Works with the organization in such a way that the process of the study, the way the student conducted the project, will have a significant impact on the organization.

	Below Proficient	Proficient	Above Proficient
Effective Written Communication	<p>Draft and final paper present many of the following problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Papers are not submitted on time; *Papers contain grammatical, spelling, and/or syntactical errors; *Papers are not well organized; *Key points in the introduction, review of literature, methods, results, and conclusions are not communicated clearly. The reader struggles to make sense of many issues; *The paper does not follow an accepted publication style, e.g., APA, Chicago. 	<p>The final paper:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Clearly explains the problem to be studied; * Effectively summarizes theory, research, and practice from the literature. The reader is able to understand the relevance of the references cited to the project; * Clearly and completely explains methods used to collect information; * Organizes results or findings in a clear, understandable fashion in tables, figures and in the narrative; * Follows an accepted citation style in headings, citations, tables, figures, etc. * Is free of grammatical and spelling errors. * Responds to concerns expressed by readers on previous drafts. 	<p>The final paper:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Presents stimulating ideas in a clear, interesting style; *Is clearly organized with each section building on information presented in previous sections; * Shows significant insight into the issues of concern. * Is free of errors and requires very little, if any, editing.

	Below Proficient	Proficient	Above Proficient
Effective oral communication	<p>The student is unable to communicate effectively with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *The client to understand the problem to be addressed; *The instructor and SPA readers to understand the requirements for the course and/or feedback on papers submitted; *The committee at the final presentation to answer questions clearly and correctly or *The committee at the final presentation to clearly and succinctly highlight the project and its accomplishments. 	<p>The student demonstrates effective oral communication skills through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Communicating effectively with the client to understand the agency/organization and the problem the client would like the student to address; *Communicating effectively with the instructor to understand the requirements of the course and readers' feedback on the paper; *Communicating effectively with other readers of the paper to understand their concerns and to obtain suggestions for references, methods, and conclusions; * Making an effective oral presentation of the project, providing appropriate background, methods, key findings and recommendations in a clear, understandable, and interesting manner. *Using visuals effectively to aid the oral presentation *Effectively answering questions of readers in response to the presentation. Answers are technically correct and clear. 	<p>The student demonstrates exemplary oral communication skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Through an oral presentation that is stimulating and an excellent summary of key issues; *By explaining complex issues concerning data and/or organizational issues with exceptional clarity and/or insights; *In interacting with readers throughout the course, shows the ability to listen well and ask thoughtful, useful questions *Answering questions from readers following the presentation completely and clearly, with answers adding valuable insight to the project.