PADM 298: Special Problems
(MPA Capstone/Culmating Experience)
Dr. Laureen Hom
Spring 2025

Instructor Information
Email: laureen.hom@sjsu.edu
Office Location: Washington Square Hall, Room 218A
Zoom Meeting ID: https://sjsu.zoom.us/my/laureenhom
Office Hours:
- Drop-in times or schedule an appointment here (but no appointment is necessary!):
  - Wed 2-4 PM (Hybid: In-Person and Zoom)
  - Thurs 12-2 PM (Zoom Only)
- Feel free to also email me to schedule an appointment outside of the designated office hour times

Course Description and Learning Objectives
This course is the required capstone (or "culminating experience") for the MPA program. During the semester, students will conduct independent research by implementing the approved prospectus they designed in PADM 297 and write their final paper under the supervision of the instructor/advisor.

By the end of the semester, students will demonstrate their ability to:
- Conceptualize problems from complex, real world situations so the problems are meaningful to clients, and are research worthy
- Collect, analyze, and synthesize information from multiple sources
- Communicate effectively in writing

Through their capstone experience, students will demonstrate the NASPAA (Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration) core competencies:
- Participate in and contribute to the public policy process
- Analyze, synthesize, think creatively, solve problems, and make decisions
- Articulate and apply public service perspectives
- Communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry

Class Format
This course is designed as a supervised independent study with no regularly scheduled in-person meetings. There are optional in-person group meetings and a suggested timeframe for completion as outlined here; however, students are

required to independently structure their time and work to successfully complete this class.

Required Materials

- **Readings:** There are no required readings for this course. Students are required to conduct independent library research to gather readings relevant to their paper topic to further strengthen their literature review for the final paper. Please review course materials from PADM 297 and other relevant courses as needed.
- **Technology and software:** Access to laptops or hotspots are available at the Student Computing Services at the Library provides equipment rentals.
  - Computer or equivalent device that will support quizzes, streaming videos, PDF viewers, and assignment uploads to Canvas
  - Word processing software for exams and assignments (should be free via your SJSU account)
  - Zoom account or access to Zoom for check-ins with Dr. Hom

Assignments and Grading

This class is graded as a **Credit/No Credit** class. Your performance will be determined and evaluated according to the successful completion of your final paper for PADM 298. In order to receive credit for the class, students must receive a score of 37 or higher based on the final paper rubric (see section below).

In addition to the final paper, you are required to submit **at least one draft** before submitting a final paper. This is to ensure that you are on the right path to complete your paper. You will be given an opportunity to submit up to 2 drafts throughout the semester. This will be determined through individual advising with the instructor. All drafts and the final paper must be submitted via Canvas and must follow the suggested format (see Final Paper Format section below). Drafts should be submitted as a Word Doc and/or Google Doc link, while the Final Paper should be submitted as a PDF. A suggested timeframe for submitting drafts is outlined below.

While we encourage students to complete their paper within the semester they enroll in PADM 298, it is also common for students to not complete their project in a single semester. If the final project is not completed in one semester, students must register in PADM 1290R for the second and following semesters. The project must be completed within seven years of starting the MPA courses. Click here for more information.

Course Policies

1. **Creating an Inclusive Classroom Community:** We are all responsible for ensuring that this class is a supportive environment for everyone. We all have

different backgrounds, knowledge, and opinions that we should all respectfully share in the classroom to learn from one another. However, we also must be sensitive to how this may shape our classroom environment throughout the semester. I expect that all students will contribute to creating a safe space so that we can have discussions that engage in critical thinking of the material. As the instructor, I will facilitate all class sessions to support respectful discussions and an exchange of ideas. I will NOT support discussions that I deem as disrespectful to the classroom community and purposefully tangential to the material. Anyone who engages in any disruptive or harmful behavior that jeopardizes, harms, provokes, dominates, or marginalizes their classmates or the instructor will be immediately asked to leave the class and face disciplinary action that may be reported to the department, Dean's Office, and Division of Student Affairs.

> **Preferred Pronouns and Names:** If you would like to be referred to by a name and/or pronoun that is different than how you are identified in the official roster, please let me know. I also will be committed to ensuring that your fellow classmates will address you by your preferred name and/or pronoun.

> **Special Accommodations:** If you need any accommodations on the basis of physical or psychological abilities, please contact the Accessible Education Center about appropriate arrangements. You may also speak to me about making arrangements, but I also will follow any official recommendations made by the AEC for accommodations.

2. **Health & Safety Policies:** The class will follow the university policies regarding any public health policies. As of August 2022, it is not required for anyone to wear a mask indoors; however, anyone is welcome to wear a mask without any questions or explanations. It is important for all of us to respect each other's decisions to protect ourselves in the classroom as needed. We must recognize that people's personal and living circumstances may require them to be more cautious than what may be the norm for ourselves.

3. **Grading Policy & Appeals:** Please allow for at least one week before asking about the status of your grade for any assignments. Grading takes time and I will get to it as quickly as possible! If I miscalculate your grade or points, please notify me ASAP – yes, it happens once in awhile! As a general policy, I do not re-grade exams or papers unless it is an exceptional circumstance. If you feel that an assignment was misgraded and would like to contest your grade, you must submit the request by email to me. In your email, you must provide a justification for why the grade does not reflect your knowledge and/or effort. I will then decide how to proceed with your grade appeal.

4. **Academic Dishonesty and Offenses:** All work submitted for the class must be your original work that demonstrates YOUR understanding and engagement with the course material during the semester. It is critical for the learning

process for you to submit your original work - it is the only way that I can let you know about your progress and help you improve. I am here to help you, not judge you! While I encourage students to work together and discuss the course material outside of class, all assignments should reflect the independent work of each student – i.e. the course requirements are not group assignments except for the in-class activities.

- **Plagiarism is strictly prohibited.** I define plagiarism as (1) other published text, whether scholarly or media, as well as your classmates' work presented as your own work; (2) self-plagiarism of work that you have done for a prior course without prior approval from the instructor; and (3) submission of writing assignments that demonstrate the overuse and/or inappropriate use of AI technology but are presented as original work (e.g. strong evidence of using Chat GPT). Papers will be processed for plagiarism on Canvas, which includes AI detection software, as well as closely reviewed by the instructor. If any academic dishonesty is found, this may result in a failing grade and will be reported to the department and Dean's Office.

    To avoid "accidental plagiarism," you must properly cite and attribute ideas and other materials to the appropriate authors. You may want to visit the [SJSU Writing Center](#) and the [SJSU Library's Citation and Writing Guide](#) for resources to help improve your writing and to ensure that you do not plagiarize in this class and for others!

- **AI Ethics and Transparency.** While I do not ban the use of AI to help with your learning, you should be using AI software and tools in an ethical manner that helps facilitate your learning (e.g. find resources and brainstorm initial ideas). As noted above, all writing assignments must demonstrate your original writing, and your assignments will also be checked to assure that you are not submitting any writing that is AI-generated. The AI detection software is mostly accurate, but it is also sensitive and can also produce false positives. In cases where you may receive a high AI detection score, you will need to meet with the instructor (me) to discuss your assignment (and possibly the department chair and college dean depending on the severity of the score). It is highly recommended that you use word processing software that autosaves the progress of your writing (e.g. Google Docs) as documentation of your original work. In addition, if you use any type of generative AI software for writing, including Grammarly, you are strongly recommended to both save the document with your original writing AND declare that you used Grammarly as a comment in your paper submission.

- **Recordings and sharing of course materials beyond private use to successfully complete the course are strictly prohibited.** Unless you have contacted the instructor or the [Accessible Education Center](#) for accommodations, you do not have automatic permission to record and

download the lectures nor distribute any materials that are posted on Canvas. If you are caught violating this, you are in violation of course and university policies, as well as possible state policies. If any academic dishonesty is found, this may result in a failing grade and will be reported to the Office of the Dean. If you need specific accommodations that require recording of materials, please contact me as soon as possible and we will work on developing appropriate accommodations.

5. **E-mail Communication Policy:** In addition to office hours, e-mail is my preferred form of communication. Try to include the course ID/name in the subject line to ensure that it does not get lost in my inbox. I will try to respond to all emails within 24 hours. If you email with me on a weekend or holiday, please anticipate that I may not answer emails within the 24 hour period. Please be courteous and professional in your in-person and email communications (e.g. refer to all your instructors as Professor unless they instruct you otherwise!).

Pro Tip: If you do have a question, I strongly recommend for you to review the syllabus, Canvas, and any course materials to see if your question has already been answered before emailing me. A lot of times, the answer is there! However, please do not hesitate to contact me if something is unclear or missing from the Canvas or syllabus!

Timeframe for Completion

The following is a recommended general timeline for students to use as a foundation to map out their individual timeline to complete their final paper. In general, students who follow this timeline will successfully complete their capstone by the end of the semester. It is also recommended that students regularly meet with the instructor/advisor to discuss their progress.

Month	Suggested Tasks & Milestones
January 2025	• Submit IRB and receive IRB approval by end of the month • Make necessary revisions from your Prospectus to start the Final Paper • Initiate data collection, especially recruitment and collection of any secondary data/documents • Confirm graduation (if not already) • Optional In-Person Meeting: Tuesday January 28 6-7 PM
February 2025	• Prioritize data collection • Begin analysis by logically managing and organizing the data you are collecting (e.g. put into SPSS/Excel/Google Sheets, transcribe interviews via Microsoft Word) • Continue to revise your Prospectus for your Final Paper, especially the Methodology section (include more information about data analysis, any changes you made to data collection, change to past tense, etc.)

Month	Suggested Tasks & Milestones
	• Submit a draft of Introduction, Lit Review, and Methodology (especially recommended if you had major feedback on your Prospectus) • Optional In-Person Meeting: Tuesday February 25, 6-7 PM
March 2025	• Wrap-up data collection [by mid-March] • Focus on analyzing data • Write initial draft Findings (and Analysis) sections • Review Literature Review and research question to make sure you are still on topic • Submit a rough draft of the paper [late March] • Optional In-Person Meeting: Tuesday March 25, 6-7 PM
April 2025	• Continue to write draft Findings (and Analysis) sections • Write draft Conclusion section • Review Introduction, Literature Review, and Methodology to make sure everything is aligned • Submit a rough draft of the paper [mid April] – This one is probably the most critical, especially if you have not submitted prior drafts • Incorporate feedback from drafts • Optional In-Person Meeting: Tuesday April 29, 6-7 PM
May 2025	• Incorporate feedback from drafts • Review the final draft to make sure every section is aligned with each other – are you ultimately answering your research question? • Submit final paper – hard deadline, no exceptions!
Final Paper Due Friday May 16 11:59 PM	

Final Paper Format

General Formatting:
All papers must use APA formatting style. Papers should be double-spaced using Times New Roman 12-point type. Pages are required and should be numbered beginning with the page after the title page. There is no page requirement for the final paper as papers vary according to the topic and methodology; however, final papers tend to be between 40-60 pages. The Final paper should also be submitted as a PDF.

Examples of final projects may be viewed at SJSU ScholarWorks [here](#) and [here](#). It is highly recommended that you find a paper that is relevant to your project and use it as a guide for formatting and organizing your final paper.

Title Page:
The title page should be centered and contain the title and author on separate lines, followed by the phrase, "A Thesis Quality Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Masters of Public Administration" followed by the adviser's name, and "The Graduate School, San Jose State University"

Major Sections of the Final Paper:
The following are the commonly used major sections for the final paper. Most students should follow this format; however, it is also recommended to work with the instructor/advisor to ensure that the final format is appropriate based on your research topic and methodology.

1. **Introduction** This section should provide the reader a general overview and background of your project (e.g. explain why this is an important issue and a brief overview of any historical, cultural, social, and/or political contexts readers should know immediately), along with a clearly stated research question. The Introduction can also include, at the end, a quick overview of what your research methods will be and the types of recommendations you are making based on your research. This should be similar to what you wrote in the Prospectus and include edits based on any additional feedback that was provided on your final prospectus. This section varies in length, but should be at least 3 pages as you want to ensure that you have a well-written set up and justification of why your project is worthy of conducting the research you are proposing.

2. **Literature Review**. The final paper should contain a comprehensive review of the relevant literature and published reports relevant to your research question and topic. The purpose of the review is to sharpen your thinking on your topic, and may point you in directions you had not previously considered. You should have completed most of this section in PADM 297. The literature review covered in the prospectus will be the core of your paper's literature research; however you may discover additional sources and so it should probably expand, but the bulk of your sources should already be in the prospectus. The format of the

literature review is an essay describing the available literature related to your topic.

As explained in PADM 297, you should present the literature in a logical order that is grouped by relevance to major topics/themes across the literature and sources you gathered. It should be written in an essay/narrative style that includes both a summary and analysis/critique of the literature. the essay you will cite the author's last name and date of the article in APA in text citation style. The literature review will vary in length, but is at least 8 pages.

3. **Methodology.** This section is a description of your research design/plan. It should follow what you created for your prospectus. If there are any major changes, you will need to seek permission of the instructor/your advisor to ensure that it is still relevant to your research question and that you do not need to submit an IRB modification. The methodology must be appropriate to the subject and your purpose in researching it, and complete, as it guides your research work. Note that while this should have been completed and approved in PADM 297, it should now be revised in the past tense because the research will have been completed.

4. **Findings.** This section constitutes the focus of your paper and the bulk of your work this semester. In this section, you should report on what you found through your data collection. This section could vary between 10 and 25 pages, depending on the topic and methodology. This section should, at minimum, include a description of the core findings of your project as it relates to your research question. (Always remember that the findings should be answering the research question – if it is not, then your final paper will not logically make sense!) The section must be clearly organized by major themes or concepts that drove your data collection. This section should also include tables (especially for quantitative-oriented projects) and interview/text quotes (especially for qualitative-oriented projects) to show evidence of your findings.

5. **Analysis** [optional]. Some papers (usually quantitative-oriented papers) will have a separate Analysis section where they interpret their findings. This is distinct from the Findings section in which it may be written more descriptively (e.g. a presentation and description of statistical findings and tables) but with limited interpretations of what the findings mean for the research question. An analysis can include observations of findings that may confirm or expand upon past research – or even challenge past studies and assumptions. It is critical that you also re-cite some of the sources in the Literature Review to help ground and justify some of your analysis and arguments about your findings. **Even if students choose to not have an Analysis section, they should still make sure that they include an interpretation and analysis of their findings in the Findings and/or Conclusion sections of their paper!**

6. **Conclusion.** In this section you summarize and further interpret your findings and make recommendations and /or draw conclusions that are grounded in the Findings section. This section may range from 5 to 20 pages or more, depending on the topic and how the Findings and/or Analysis sections are structured.

7. **References.** This section is the complete list of every source that you cited in your paper. It should include every source that you used to develop every element of your paper. **Failure to cite all your sources throughout the paper AND in the reference list will be constituted as plagiarism and may result in a failing/no credit grade for this course.**

8. **Appendix** [optional]**.** While not required, you are encouraged to submit an Appendix to include any additional materials that were relevant to your project. The Appendix does not count towards the page length, and any items you list here should be referenced or cited in your final paper. In other words, you would include "(See Appendix A)" at the end of a sentence. Some items that are often included in the Appendix include:
   a. Raw statistical data
   b. Copies of data collection instruments (surveys, interview questionnaires)
   c. Tables and figures that may be important, but more secondary to the ones presented in your findings

Optional submission to Scholarworks
While not required, we support students to submit their final paper to Scholarworks so that future students may see examples of strong papers. The instructor/advisor may approach you about submitting or you may also volunteer to submit your paper to Scholarworks. Interested students will work with the instructor/advisor and the library to submit their papers.

Final Paper Rubric

The final paper rubric is assessed out of a total point score of 44. Students must receive a score of 37 or better, with no score below 3, for their final paper.

CRITERIA	Excellent	Good	Marginal	Unacceptable	Rating	Weight	Score
Outcome 1. Demonstrates ability to conceptualize problems from complex, real world situations so the problems are meaningful to clients, and are research worthy (maximum score: 12)							
1. Are the research **questions** and/or **goals** well defined and clearly stated?	4	3	2	1		1	
2. Does the author demonstrate in-depth familiarity with relevant **literature** on the subject?	4	3	2	1		1	
3. Is the **methodology** appropriate to answer the research question(s)?	4	3	2	1		1	
TOTAL SCORE FOR OUTCOME 1= 12							
Outcome 2. Demonstrates ability to collect, analyze, and synthesize information from multiple sources (maximum score: 16)							
4. Is the **data collected** sufficient in quality and depth to answer the research question?	4	3	2	1		1.5	
5. Is the **analysis** direct, competent, and appropriate?	4	3	2	1		1.5	
6. Are the **conclusions** sophisticated and based on the results of the analysis, as a logical extension of the findings?	4	3	2	1		0.5	
7. Does the author show how his/her analysis and findings fit into the larger **context** of the literature and current professional practice?	4	3	2	1		0.5	
TOTAL SCORE FOR OUTCOME 2= 16							
Outcome 3. Demonstrates ability to communicate effectively in writing (maximum score: 16)							
8. Is the material logically **organized**, so that a reader can easily follow the writer's train of thought?	4	3	2	1		1	
9. Is the writing grammatically **correct** and free of typos?	4	3	2	1		2	
10. Do **tables** and **figures** add useful/important information for the reader?	4	3	2	1		0.5	

11. Are **citations** included where appropriate, and are in-text citations, footnotes and reference list properly formatted in APA style?	4	3	2	1		0.5	
TOTAL SCORE FOR OUTCOME 3= 16							

TOTAL SCORE Assessment:

Excellent (44-41):   The work is ready for public distribution without any modification.

Good (40-37):   The work is essentially sound, but in need of some refinement before public distribution.

Marginal (36-33):   The work contained some worthwhile elements, but required major revisions before public distribution.

Unacceptable (32 and below):   The work needs to be entirely redone.