COURSE SUMMARY

Capstone is learning in action. Part of Wagner’s core curriculum, it provides students with both a critical learning experience and an opportunity to perform a public service. Over the course of an academic year, students work in teams to address challenges, solve problems and identify opportunities for a client organization. Students will design the approach, conduct the data collection and analysis, and present findings, both orally and in writing, to the client.

In architecture, the capstone is the crowning piece of an arch, the center stone that holds the arch together, giving it shape and strength. Wagner’s Capstone program plays a similar role, by building on students’ previous coursework and expertise, while also enhancing student learning on policy and management issues, key process skills and research skills. Capstone requires students to interweave their learning in all these areas, and to do so in real time, in an unpredictable, complex real world environment. Although divided into teams, the class will work as a learning community dedicated to the success of all the projects.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Capstone integrates and enhances learning in several arenas: a content or issue area, process skills including project, client and team management, and research methods for gathering, analyzing and reporting data. The specific learning objectives are:

A. CONTENT

Students should:

• understand the policy context for their project;
• be familiar with specialized vocabularies required to perform the project successfully;
• be aware of critical research related to their content area;
• be capable of positioning and evaluating their project within its broader policy context.

B. PROCESS

• Overall, students should demonstrate a capacity for flexibility and resilience, as shown by adapting to changing and complex circumstances, balancing competing demands and accepting uncertainty and lack of clarity when necessary.

1. Project Management

Students should demonstrate the ability to:
• assess the client organization and its environment;
• frame and refine the problem presented by the client;
• develop a work agreement with the client for the project
• develop an internal project work plan with timelines and deliverables;
• monitor their progress against the work agreement and workplan;
• revise the workplan as necessary;
• develop well-supported and realistic recommendations.

2. Client Management
Students should demonstrate the ability to:
• develop and sustain their relationship with the client;
• negotiate a work agreement with timelines and deliverables;
• maintain regular and productive contact with the client;
• solicit and integrate feedback on progress against the contract and modify as necessary;
• deliver final product to client’s satisfaction.

3. Team Management
Students should demonstrate the ability to:
• understand group formation and development;
• understand the importance of interpersonal dynamics and team norms;
• create and periodically review their team charter;
• develop clear role descriptions for team members;
• manage team assignments and accountability;
• advocate points of view and negotiate differences of opinion;
• solicit and offer feedback;
• appreciate and learn from cultural differences.

C. RESEARCH
Students should demonstrate the ability to:
• identify appropriate quantitative and/or qualitative data gathering and analysis methods for their particular project;
• follow established sampling procedures to create appropriate samples for their particular project;
• carry out data collection methods appropriate for their particular project, potentially including surveys and questionnaires, individual interviews, focus groups, and access to already existing datasets;
• situate their findings in the broader related literature;
• draw conclusions based on their findings;
• effectively communicate their work both orally and in writing.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
I have identified an array of potential projects. Potential clients will present their projects to you in the first couple of weeks in class. I will ask you for your preferences, but – just to be very clear – I will create the teams based not only on your preferences, but also on your previous
coursework, work and life experience, other expertise, and team size. Teams are comprised of 3-5 students.

The class will involve presentations from the instructor, possible guest speakers, class discussion and team meetings. Course requirements include:
  - enrollment in both semesters;
  - attendance and participation in class activities and team meetings;
  - completion of assignments on time;
  - participation in field work;
  - participation in meetings with clients;
  - participation in preparation and presentation of findings.

Some client organizations may not be US-based. This will necessitate use of skype /teleconferencing /televideo conferencing for client meetings, depending on the facilities available to the client. Some projects may require travel for field work which will take place during Winter break. The school will cover financial support for the airfare if such work is necessary, but will not cover the full costs of travel. It may not be required or possible for all students to travel.

**EVALUATION and GRADING**

Students will receive two credits for the fall semester and two for the spring semester. At the end of the first semester, students will receive a grade of “IP” (Incomplete Pass) to reflect the “work in progress” nature of the year long project. I will assign final grades at the end of the second semester.

Grades will be allotted to individuals, not to the team as a whole. That is, team members may receive different grades if I feel that is warranted. I will make this judgment based both on my assessment of students’ contribution and learning and on the assessments you give each other as part of the evaluation process at the end of the first and second semesters.

Students will be graded on both the products they deliver to their clients and evidence of progressive learning throughout the course, based on the Learning Objectives. 60% of final grade is based on work products identified in the milestones as well as any interim deliverables to the client or assigned by the faculty member. 40% of the final grade is based on evidence of the individual student’s learning during the course through participation in the team’s work and class activities, his/her ability to act on peer and faculty feedback; individual and team preparation for and performance at client meetings; and end-of-semester faculty, peer and self evaluations.
REQUIRED TEXTS


Additional readings and resources will be suggested to team when projects are selected.

COURSE MILESTONES

The course has a series of milestones – both activities and products -- that will serve as interim work products. I’ve suggested time frames in parentheses, though actual timing during the course of the year may vary depending on the specific situation of each team and client.

These milestones include:

• Preference/information forms (September/October);
• “Entry conference” with client and faculty to explain the process of the course, establish relationship, assess the client organization, and gather data in order to clarify the presenting problem or issue and client’s initial vision of a successful project (October);
• Summary by team of first meeting with client and clear statement of the problem (October);
• Preliminary client-team contract or work agreement; presentation to class/faculty for feedback prior to client presentation (October/November);
• Negotiations with client to finalize contract (October/November);
• Final, signed client-team contract and detailed team workplan (November);
• Team charter (October);
• End-of-first semester self, team/peer, and course evaluations; discussion of team process and progress (December);
• First draft of final project report to faculty (February/March);
• Second draft of final project report to faculty (March/April);
• Rehearsal of client presentation before class/faculty for feedback before presentation to client (March/April);
• Final report and presentation to client (April);
• End-of-second semester reflection, positioning project in larger issue context (May);
• End-of-course self, team /peer, client and course evaluations (end April/beginning of May);
• Presentation for Capstone Expo (May).
CLASS SCHEDULE: FIRST SEMESTER

IMPORTANT NOTE RE FALL SCHEDULE: Monday, October 12 is a holiday and no classes are held. However, the next day, Tuesday October 13, is following a Monday class schedule. That means students expect to go to their Monday classes on Tuesday.

Twice during the year we require all students to attend a Capstone skills training instead of going to class. These dates are:

1) October 26, 2015: Capstone Advanced Team Session. This a team-building session in which students will work as teams. All students must be present.
2) February 29, 2016: Presentation Skills training. All students must be present.

Also, Capstone Expo will be on Tuesday, May 10, 2016.

The list of weeks and topics that follows is preliminary and subject to change. Students should expect to meet weekly as a class or team unless agreed in class.

Week 1 September 14, 2015:
Overview and introductions: Get to know each other a little. Review the syllabus and clarify course structure and expectations. Begin potential client presentations about their projects.

Week 2 September 21, 2015:
Continue with client presentations and misc course logistics.

Assignments for Week 3
- Team selection: Fill out Student Information and Preference Form and attach your resume. Please make this one document and post this on NYU Classes by September 25, 2015.
- Teams will be posted on NYU Classes by September 28, 2015. Team assignments:
  - Schedule one get-together that is purely about getting to know each other. See handout, if you wish, for sample questions and topics to address.
  - Schedule and conduct initial client meeting by October 23, 2015. I must be present at the meeting (I will give you my availability).
  - Bring in background information on your client for team and class discussion.
- Reading for class discussion:
  - Flawless Consulting (read in this order): Preface to the third edition, chapter 19, and then chapters 1, 2 and 3.

Week 3: September 28, 2015
You will come to class knowing your project teams. Overview of consulting based on readings. Prepare for initial client meeting, both as a class and in teams. What do you need to learn from this meeting? How can you help your client give you that information?

Assignments for Week 4
- All students: Flawless Consulting, chapters 4 and 5.
Week 4: October 5, 2015
We will discuss ethics-related issues in Capstone, common data collection methods, and the elements of a successful client-team work agreement and an (internal) workplan. We will also hear from teams that met with client.

Week 5: Time to work in teams (October 12/13, 2015)
Team work time—meet wherever teams choose.

Assignment for Week 6
- Teams that have met with their client: 2-page memo summarizing the team’s findings from their assessment meeting, including a clear statement of the problem. Be prepared to present to class.
- As first step toward developing full work agreement, teams prepare document including: statement of the problem, objective of project, information needed, boundaries of the project, final product and interim deliverables. These must be emailed to me by October 21, 2015.

Week 6: October 19, 2015
Team meetings with professor to review progress. Teams continue to work on work agreement and workplan.

Assignment for Week 7
- Draft of full client-team work agreement (adding client support and involvement, and set of tasks) and draft of internal workplan. These must be emailed to me by October 29, 2015.

Week 7: October 26: Capstone skills training REQUIRED instead of going to class (see above fall schedule notes). Time/Location TBA.

Week 8: November 2, 2015
Each team presents their draft work agreement as rehearsal for presentation to and negotiation with the client. Team meetings to incorporate feedback into plan.

Assignment: Negotiate work agreement with client. This could involve in-person meetings or could be done by email and phone. If you do set up a meeting, I must attend. (I will give you my availability).

Week 9: November 9, 2015
Review of Literature Reviews. Continue work on team charters: this will involve reviewing how the team has worked together so far, deciding what elements you wish to retain and then redesigning the elements you want to change.

Assignment for Week 9:
- Final written work plan agreed with client. This should be signed by the client and team.
Week 9: November 16, 2015
Discussion of team dynamics, including working in diverse teams. Continue work on team charters.

- Assignments for Week 10
  - Team charter due.
  - Flawless Consulting, chapters 10 and 13

Week 10: November 23, 2015
Review of work and relationship with client thus far. Each team will present particular issues they face and their plans to develop and sustain relationship going forward. Also more information about data gathering methods; we will focus on the tools you intend to use, but could include: interviewing, surveys, observation, literature review, and focus groups.

Week 11: November 30, 2015
Team meetings. I will be available as needed.

**Individual Assignment for Week 12**
  - End-of-semester written self-assessment, peer review of team members and feedback for me on the course.

Week 12: December 7, 2015
Info on data gathering methods with guest speaker.

Week 13: December 14, 2015
I will review feedback to me about the course. Also, I will meet with each team individually to review progress, discuss results of peer evaluations, and highlight any issues for second semester. I will schedule an hour with each team which means some meetings will take place outside of class time.

Week 14: December 21, 2015
Team meetings. I will be available as needed.
CLASS SCHEDULE: SECOND SEMESTER

During this semester, much of the time will be set aside for teams to meet on their own or with me. We can be flexible about the need for formal class meeting times as the semester progresses. However, as needed, we will schedule problem-solving or skill-building sessions, so you must be available every Monday night during class time. Also, for planning purposes, I’ve noted here some potential deadlines, but these are preliminary and could change.

Week 1: January 25, 2016
Class meeting: Will discuss schedule for the spring semester; I will meet with each team.
   ➢ For this class: revise workplan and team charter and send to me.

Week 2: February 1, 2016
Team meeting time.
   ➢ Assignment for Week 3
      o Flawless Consulting, chapter 14

Week 3: February 8, 2016
Class meeting: Discussion of formats and language for final presentations and final reports. Also, team meeting time.
   ➢ Assignment for Week 4
      o First draft of final report

Week 4: February 15, 2016: HOLIDAY NO CLASS

Week 5: February 22, 2016
Class meeting: Discuss first drafts of final reports. Also, team meeting time.
   ➢ Assignments for Week 6
      o Second draft of final report
      o Draft slides are due one week before rehearsal of final presentation

Week 6: February 29, 2016: Presentation Skills training. All students must be present.
Location TBD

Week 7: March 7, 2016
Team meeting time
   ➢ Assignment for Week 8
      o Flawless Consulting, chapter 15

Week 8: March 14, 2016-SPRING BREAK NO CLASS

Week 9: March 21, 2016
Class meeting: Discuss managing the client meeting; also team meeting time.
   ➢ Assignment: Each team should schedule their final presentations to the clients during the period between April 11-25, 2016. I should be present (I will give you my availability).
Week 10: March 28, 2016
Class meeting: Team rehearsals of final presentations

Week 11: April 4, 2016
Class meeting: Team rehearsals of final presentations

Week 12: April 11, 2016-No formal Class meeting

Week 13: April 18, 2016-No formal class meeting
Take a step back and reflect on the year’s work and your own learning. Celebration!

Week 14: April 25, 2016
Class meeting: Report back on client response to final presentations and necessary changes to final report. Discuss preparation for Capstone End Event.

Assignments for Week 13
- Final Project Report
- Final Team, Self and Client Evaluations

Week 15: May 2, 2016
Take a step back and reflect on the year’s work and your own learning. Celebration!

Capstone Expo May 10, 2016