NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE

CAP-GP 3401-004 (5124)
Capstone: Advanced Projects in Management, Finance, and Policy I

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I. 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 projects.

II. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

A. Content
Students should demonstrate the ability to:
- understand the policy and/or management context for their project;
- be familiar with relevant specialized vocabularies;
- draw on critical research related to their content area;
- connect their project with previous coursework in their broader program and specialization.

B. Process
Overall, students should demonstrate a capacity for flexibility and resilience, as shown by adapting to changing and complex circumstances, balancing competing demands, accepting uncertainty and ambiguity, and knowing when to consult with their Capstone instructor.

1. Project Management
Students should demonstrate the ability to:
- frame and refine the problem presented by the client;
● develop a contract with the client including scope, timeline and deliverables;
● develop an internal project work plan;
● meet deadlines and monitor their progress against the contract and work plan; and
● revise contract and work plan as necessary.

2. Client Management
Students should demonstrate the ability to:
● negotiate a contract with their client;
● develop and sustain a relationship with their client;
● maintain regular and productive communications with the client;
● solicit and integrate feedback from the client on design and deliverables; and
● submit deliverables on time.

3. Team Management
Students should demonstrate the ability to:
● diagnose and attend to interpersonal dynamics;
● define roles and useful division of labor;
● manage assignments and accountability;
● advocate points of view and negotiate differences of opinion;
● solicit and offer feedback; and
● appreciate and learn from cultural and other differences.

C. Research
Students should demonstrate the ability to:
● identify and synthesize existing research relevant to the project;
● identify and implement appropriate quantitative and/or qualitative data gathering methods;
● identify and implement appropriate data analysis procedures;
● determine findings; and
● develop useful recommendations and/or tools and resources based on findings.

D. Communication
Students should demonstrate the ability to:
● synthesize and summarize large amounts of data and information;
● prepare clear and well-argued written deliverables tailored to the client’s needs; and
● prepare clear and well-argued verbal presentations tailored to the client’s needs.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The class will involve presentations from the instructor, 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; and
participation in preparation and presentation of findings.

Based on a competitive proposal submission process, I have identified an array of potential client projects for you. Potential clients will present their projects to you in the first several weeks in class. I will ask you for and consider your preferences, but I will ultimately create the teams based not only on your preferences, but also on other factors such as your previous coursework, work and life experience, skills, schedules and team size. I expect that all teams will be composed of 3-5 students.

If appropriate, Capstone teams may be reimbursed up to $500 for expenses such as reproduction, binding, local travel, and/or preparation of Capstone documents and display materials over the course of the year. If assigned to an out-of-city client, such as Victory Housing, supplemental funding for travel fares may also be available.

IV. EVALUATION AND GRADING

Students will receive 1.5 credits for the fall semester and 1.5 credits for the spring semester. At the end of the first semester, all capstone students receive a grade of “IP” (Incomplete Pass) to reflect the “work in progress” nature of the year-long project; do not be alarmed by this designation. I will assign final grades to our class at the end of the second semester based on two scores: Individual Class Contribution Score and Individual Team Project Score.

A. Individual Class Contribution Score
Thirty percent (30%) of your grade will be based on your class contributions (as distinct from participation alone) and demonstrated individual learning throughout the course.

This portion of your grade will be out of 30 possible points and will be assessed based on factors such as your thoughtful contributions to class, your ability to act on and learn from both peer and faculty feedback, and a series of end-of-semester evaluations that will be submitted by you, your peers, and me. To this last point, I will pay particular attention to which specific students are indicated in surveys to have contributed the most to the class’s overall learning.

B. Individual Team Project Score
Seventy percent (70%) of your letter grade for this year-long project will be based, first, on your team’s overall project performance, and, second, on your contributions to that performance.

Overall team project scores will be awarded out of 70 possible points based on an evaluation of team work products and deliverables to the client. Your individual team project score will either be the same score out of 70 points as your team’s overall score, or some partial fraction thereof.

In considering whether or not to award you the full value of your overall team project score, I will be relying primarily on the end-of-semester assessments that your team members provide about you and the reduced share, if any, that they indicate you should receive. As an example, if a four-person team receives the maximum possible 70 points, but three team members indicate in surveys that the fourth team member only contributed 80% of a “fair share” of work, then, to the extent that I assess the feedback to be appropriate, it is possible that three of the team members
could receive 70 points, while the under-contributing team member could receive only 56 points (or, 80% of 70 possible points). Under no circumstances do I intend to assign any student with an individual team project score lower than that recommended by their peers.

The purpose of using a pro-rated team grading system is to more fairly allocate credit for your team’s work. In some instances, one team member may be vigorously pursuing an A, whereas another team member may place less importance on their course grade, being perfectly content with limiting their effort to the amount of work required to earn a B-. In my view, each student is welcome to their own preference, as differences such as these are facts of life in the workplace. However, the result of these differing incentives in an academic team environment is predictable and problematic—tension is created between the students seeking an A, who end up doing substantially more work, and the student seeking a B-, who resents the pressure to continue working after reaching a B-level of work. Pro-rated team grading systems thereby more fairly allow and account for material differences in team member contributions.

C. NYU Wagner Grading Policies
For information on NYU Wagner’s official grading policies, see: https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/policies/grading.

V. REQUIRED TEXTS

As of the writing of this syllabus, I do not expect that students of this section will be required to purchase any external texts in order to fulfill the requirements of the course.

All required readings and viewable content are expected to be publicly available, available through NYU's various information services, or be specifically uploaded to our NYU Classes website. Required readings will be added to the NYU Classes website at least one week prior to the next class session.

In addition to required readings, I will also occasionally list optional readings. The primary distinction between optional readings and required readings is that students will not be expected to have completed optional readings for purposes of class discussion, which will focus on required readings.

A handful of our readings will draw from one particular text: Flawless Consulting, 3rd edition, by Peter Block (2011). To the extent that the class is assigned required readings from this text, I will provide such sections as PDF excerpts. It is not necessary for any student of this course to purchase this book, but any student who seeks to obtain a greater understanding of consulting beyond the provided resources is welcome to buy it and read the full text.

VI. COURSE MILESTONES

The course has a series of milestones – both activities and products -- that will serve as interim work products. Suggested time frames are provided in parentheses, but actual timing during the course of the year may vary depending on the specific situation of each team and client.
An illustrative list of these milestones include:

- Presentations by potential clients to students (September);
- Team formation (September);
- “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 (September/October);
- Preliminary client-team contract or work agreement; presentation to class/faculty for feedback prior to giving to client (October/November);
- Negotiations with client to finalize contract (October/November);
- Final, signed client-team contract and detailed team work plan (November);
- Team charter (November);
- End-of-first semester self, team/peer, and course evaluations; discussion of team process and progress (December);

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- 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-course self, team/peer, client and course evaluations (end April/beginning of May);
- End-of-second semester reflection and celebration (May);
- Presentation at Capstone Expo (May).

VII. CLASS SCHEDULE: FIRST SEMESTER

The list of weeks and topics that follows is preliminary and subject to change. Students should keep close track of announcements posted on NYU Classes and should expect to meet weekly as a class or team unless agreed-upon in class.

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Session #1 - Monday, September 11: Introducing Capstone / Meet the Clients
Our first session will involve getting to know each other, setting expectations, previewing our year ahead, and viewing some initial presentations from our prospective clients. All students should review the proposal for Victory Housing (and, if possible the proposals for all prospective clients) prior to class and take extra care to be present and arrive on time for our early sessions, as they will significantly inform and influence your year ahead.

➢ Guest Speaker:
  ○ 7:30 - 8:00 p.m.: Leila A. Finucane, CEO, Victory Housing

● Assignment for Session 2:
Read all remaining client capstone proposals and prepare questions for the
remaining presentations.

Session #2 - Monday, September 18: Meet the Clients Part II
During our second session, we will host three more prospective client presentations.

➢ Guest Speakers:
   ○ 7:00 - 7:30 p.m.: Catherine Trapani, E.D., Homeless Services United
   ○ 7:30 - 8:00 p.m.: Naftuli Moster, E.D., Yaffed
   ○ 8:00 - 8:25 p.m.: Michael Ottley, Director of Ops., Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen

➢ Assignments for Session 3:

Session #3 - Monday, September 25: Team Selection/Overview of Consulting
During our third session, we will host our final prospective client, debrief from our client presentations and talk broadly about consulting.

➢ Guest Speaker:
   ○ 7:00 - 7:30 p.m.: Lana Rusky-Kidd, Head of School, The Shefa School

➢ Assignments for Session 4
   ○ Submit a copy of your resume to NYU Classes by Friday, September 29. You will not be evaluated based on your resume, which is being requested only to assist me in creating balanced and effective teams.
   ○ Submit a copy of your Student Information and Preference Form by Friday, September 29.

Session #4 - Monday, October 2: Preparing for Client Meeting #1
You will come to class knowing your teams. Prepare for an 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? We will also hear from a guest speaker with experience founding and managing an urban planning consulting firm.

➢ Guest Speaker:
   ○ 7:00 – 7:30 p.m.: Rebecca Karp, Founder and Principal, Karp Strategies

➢ Assignments for Session #6 (Session #5 is a special session; see below)
   ○ Schedule an initial team get-together that is purely about getting to know each other, and email me a photo of the meet-up to share with the class.
   ○ Schedule an initial client meeting to occur between Tuesday, October 3, and Friday, October 20. The purposes of this meeting should be to introduce yourselves to the client team and to gather more information about the organization and their project. Your team members and I should both be present for this meeting. I will share my availability with you in advance.
   ○ After holding your client meeting, prepare and submit a summary memorandum documenting the meeting discussion, outcomes and next steps.
Readings: Flawless Consulting, 3rd edition, by Peter Block (2011), Chapter 4, Pages 51-66, and Chapter 5, Pages 70-97,103-105 (available under “Lessons” on NYU Classes).

No Class - Monday, October 9: Fall Recess

Special Session #5 - Monday, October 16: Skills Training in Project Management
Twice during the year, NYU Wagner holds mandatory Capstone skills trainings during the Monday Capstone class time. This session will cover the basics of project management and take place from 6:45-8:25 PM in the Eisner & Lubin Auditorium at the Kimmel Center.

Session #6 - Monday, October 23: Developing Work Plans and Client Agreements
Teams present debriefs on their initial client meetings. We will also discuss developing your client-team work agreement and internal team work plans.

➢ Assignment for Session #7
  o As a first step towards preparing your project planning documents, all teams should prepare a preliminary scope of work that describes: a statement of the problem, the objective(s) of your project, the information needed, the boundaries of the project, the final product and all interim deliverables. **Scopes of work must be uploaded to NYU Classes no later than Sunday, October 29.**
  o Readings: to be assigned.

Session #7 - Monday, October 30: Delivering Client Presentations
Discussion of effective client presentations. Team meetings will be held with instructor to review project progress. Teams meet to develop high-level scope of work into: a) full draft of client-team work agreement; and b) full draft of internal team work plan.

➢ Assignment for Session #8
  o Draft of full client-team work agreement (adding client support and involvement, and set of tasks) and draft of internal work plan (with detailed list and timeline of project tasks). **These must be emailed to me by Sunday, November 5.** For sample client-team work agreements and workplans, see the examples on NYU Classes.
  o Readings: to be assigned.

Session #8 - Monday, November 6: Preparing for Client Meeting #2
Each team presents their draft client-team work agreement as a rehearsal for a presentation to and negotiation with the client. Team meetings held in class to incorporate feedback into plan.

➢ Assignment for Session #9:
  o Negotiate work agreement with client between Tuesday, November 7, and Sunday, November 19. Negotiations could involve an in-person meeting or could be done by email and phone. If you do set up a meeting, I must attend and will give you my availability.
  o Readings: to be assigned.
Session #9 - Monday, November 13: Principles for Successful Teams
Those teams who have met with clients will present the results of the meeting. Discussion of principles for successful teams, followed by in-class meetings to discuss team charters.

➢ Assignment for Session #10:
  o Finalize written client-team agreements and internal team work plans, if not yet completed. Agreements should be signed by the client and team members; work plans should be retained and updated internally by the student team. The signed client-team agreement and full preliminary work plan both must be emailed to me by Sunday, November 19.
  o Bring a list of issues to be considered in your team charters to Session #10.
  o Readings: to be assigned.

Session #10: Monday, November 20 - Data and Research Skills Workshop
Teams present and reflect on the results of their client-team negotiations. Review of information about topics as prioritized by class; could focus on the tools you intend to use, such as interviewing, surveys, observation, literature review, and focus groups.

➢ Assignments for Session #11
  o Final drafts of team charters must be signed and uploaded to NYU Classes prior to the start of class in Session #11 or else delivered to me at the start of Session #11.
  o Readings: to be assigned.

Session #11: Monday, November 27 - Managing Clients
Review of work and relationship with client thus far. Each team will present the particular issues they face and their plans to develop and sustain their client relationships going forward. If needed, more info on data and research techniques.

➢ Assignments for Session #12
  o Readings: to be assigned.

Session #12: Monday, December 4 - Special Topics/Work Session
If needed, guest speakers on special topics. Team meetings. I will be available as needed.

➢ Individual Assignment for Session #13
  o End-of-semester written self-assessment, peer review of team members and feedback for me on the course.
  o Readings: to be assigned.

Session #13: Monday, December 11 - Special Topics/Work Session
If needed, guest speakers on special topics. Team meetings. I will be available as needed.

Session #14: Monday, December 18 - Reviewing Team Performance
I will review feedback provided to me about the course’s first semester. Also, I will meet with each team individually to review progress, discuss results of peer evaluations, and highlight any issues for the second semester. I will schedule time with each team, which means some meetings will take place outside of class time.
VIII. CLASS SCHEDULE: SECOND SEMESTER

A preliminary schedule for the second semester will be made available in January 2018.

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.

Outside of class time, your capstone experience will conclude with a Capstone Expo, which will be held on Tuesday, May 8, 2018, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Rosenthal Pavilion at the Kimmel Center.

IX. CHANGES TO SYLLABUS

The schedule in this syllabus should be a fairly accurate roadmap to your year ahead. However, I may still elect to change aspects of the syllabus and its contents as the year goes on. My ultimate hope is for this course to be a meaningful and rewarding conclusion to your time at NYU Wagner, and, in the event that we identify changes to our plans that would result in a more educational overall experience, I will happily implement them.

As one example, if we find that we are collectively lacking in education on a given topic, then I may change the theme and content of a given session, use alternative teaching materials and/or invite an appropriate guest speaker. In this respect, I encourage all of you to take ownership in conveying such opportunities for improvement to me and identifying “wish list” guest speakers in order to help maximize the quality and nature of our capstone experience.