

# CAPSTONE: CAP-GP 3601 002

# Fall 2023 – Spring 2024

## **Instructor Information**

### Meredith Phillips Almeida

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## **Course Information**

* Class Meeting Time: Mondays, 6:45pm - 8:25pm
* Class Location: Please consult with your faculty advisor

### Course Description

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.

### Course Learning Objectives

1. 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.
1. 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 workplan;
	+ meet deadlines and monitor their progress against the contract and workplan;
	+ revise contract and workplan as necessary.
1. 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 communication with the client;
	+ solicit and integrate feedback from the client on design and deliverables;
	+ submit deliverables on time.
1. 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;
	+ appreciate and learn from cultural and other differences.
1. 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;
	+ develop useful recommendations and/or tools and resources based on findings.
1. 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;
	+ prepare clear and well-argued verbal presentations tailored to the client’s needs.

### Learning Assessment Table

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| **Course Learning Objective** | **Corresponding Assignment** |
| Understand the policy and/or management context for their project | Interim and final products |
| Be familiar with relevant specialized vocabularies | Interim and final products |
| Draw on critical research related to their content area | Interim and final products |
| Frame and refine the problem presented by the client | Signed contract with client |
| Develop a contract with the client including scope, timeline and deliverables | Signed contract with client |
| Develop an internal project workplan | Team workplan |
| Meet deadlines and monitor their progress against the contract and workplan | Signed contract and team workplan |

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| --- | --- |
| Advocate points of view and negotiate differences of opinion | Self and team peer evaluations |
| Appreciate and learn from cultural and other differences | Self and team peer evaluations |
| Identify and synthesize existing research relevant to the project | Interim and final products |
| Identify and implement appropriate quantitative and/or qualitative data gathering methods | Interim and final products |
| Identify and implement appropriate data analysis procedures | Interim and final products |
| Determine findings | Interim and final products |
| Develop useful recommendations and/or tools and resources based on findings | Interim and final products |
| Synthesize and summarize large amounts of data and information | Interim and final products |
| Prepare clear and well-argued written deliverables tailored to the client’s needs | Interim and final products |
| Prepare clear and well-argued verbal presentations tailored to the client’s needs | Interim and final presentations |

**Course Requirements**

Once you are familiar with the projects, you will fill out a form which gives faculty advisors your project rankings and other information. We will take your preferences into account along with the needs of the project, students’ previous coursework, work and life experience, student schedules, team size, and the balance of skills among the team. Ultimately, it’s our job to create teams that can do the work for the client. Teams are comprised of 3-5 students.

The class will involve presentations from the instructor, possible guest speakers, class discussion and team meetings. You should expect to work approximately 5-10 hours a week, including class time, team meetings and project work. Course requirements include:

* enrollment in both semesters;
* attendance and participation in class activities and team meetings;
* completion of assignments on time;
* participation in project work;
* participation in meetings with clients;
* participation in preparation and presentation of findings.

Though Capstone classes are in-person, your team and client meetings do not have to be. Teams can work this out with each other and their client. (We do encourage the first and last meetings with the client to be in person if at all possible.)

### Capstone Expenses:

Each capstone team is entitled to reimbursement of up to $500 of Capstone related expenses, such as photocopying, supplies, etc. None of these funds can be spent hiring others to do work that you are expected to do, like writers, editors, graphic designers, etc. The forms and procedures needed to claim reimbursement for these expenses and a detailed explanation of eligible expenses are found in the Capstone Student Guide, available on the Brightspace course website.

### Evaluation and Grading

Students will receive 1.5 credits for the fall semester and 1.5 for the spring semester. You will be graded at the end of each semester. The grade at the end of the first semester will reflect your work, participation and learning to date. I will assign final grades at the end of the second semester. Your final grade will override your fall grade (that is, your fall grade will be changed to reflect your final grade.)

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. If the client’s evaluation of your work is available, I will also take that into account.

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. Approximately **70% is based on work products** such as interim and final deliverables as well as other assignments. Approximately **30% is based on evidence of the individual student’s learning** during the course through participation in the team’s work and class activities, their 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 Readings and Other Resources

Course readings will be available on the Brightspace website for this course.

### Course Milestones

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

These milestones include:

* Potential client presentations (August/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 (October);
* Negotiations with client to finalize contract (October);
* Final, signed client-team contract and detailed team workplan (October/November);
* Team charter (October/November);
* End-of-first semester self, team/peer, and course evaluations; discussion of team process and progress (December);
* January term: Continue project work (January)
* 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 (April);
* Final report and presentation to client (April/May);
* End-of-second semester reflection and celebration (April/May);
* End-of-course self, team /peer, client and course evaluations (April/May);

# URBAN PLANNING CAPSTONE CLASS SCHEDULE

**As of 9/6/2023**

## FALL 2023 SEMESTER MONDAY 6:45-8:25pm

### Class Schedule Overview

Students should expect to meet weekly as a class or team unless agreed in class. **The sequence of classes, and due dates for assignments, could change** depending on your meetings with clients and the substance of your projects.

**Note that all interim and final deliverables must go first to your faculty advisor before they go to the client. We may go through several rounds of revision** before the products are ready to be shared with the client.

Specific requirements for each class will be posted on Brightspace and emailed to you with enough lead time to prepare. **Instructions in email or Brightspace take precedence over what is written here**.

The schedule and topics below may vary based on individual project needs. The intent is to use class time in a way that enables teams to produce the highest quality projects on a timely basis and achieve the learning objectives of the course. A greater number of class-based presentations and discussions are likely early on in the course in order for Capstone faculty to provide guidance on project management and direction. The Spring semester schedule (to be distributed at a later date) allows for greater time for team working sessions.

**Note**: Though some class time is allotted for team meetings/work, it is anticipated that students and their teams will need to devote additional non-class time on a weekly basis to complete the work necessary on their Capstone projects.

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| **Class Date (Mondays)** | **Class Topic and Description** | **Assignments Due**(all assignments are due to faculty advisor in advance of class unlessotherwise noted) |
| Class 1 of 14 9/11/23 | Introduction to Urban Planning Capstone 2023-24Discussion on Client Applicant Presentations | Watch “What is Capstone?” video: [https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/stud](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/academics/capstone) [ents/academics/capstone](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/academics/capstone)Watch NYU Brightspace Overview video: [https://brightspace.nyu.edu/d2l/le/](https://brightspace.nyu.edu/d2l/le/news/6606/27815/view) [news/6606/27815/view](https://brightspace.nyu.edu/d2l/le/news/6606/27815/view)Review Capstone Syllabus and Student Guide**Teams Formed** |
| Class 2 of 14 9/18/23 | Preparation for kick-off meeting with client; Team Dynamics* Team formation begins. Class will focus on an introduction to team dynamics, establishment of team norms, and importance of team communication.
* Teams, during class: Establish weekly meeting time; set up shared Google Drive folder; draft introductory email to client scheduling client kick-off meeting. *Note: The faculty advisor will attend the client kick-off meeting—please consult their schedule in setting up this meeting, taking into account the time it takes to set up a meeting and coordinate schedules in planning to*

*meet deadlines.* | **Due Fri 9/22: Submit draft client kick-off meeting agenda** to faculty advisor.Watch Capstone consulting videos: 1) Intro, 2) What Consulting Is and Isn’t, 3) The Role of Technical and Interpersonal Skills, 4) The Project Management Triangle, 5) Client Expectations 6) Risk Management, 7) Client Meeting ManagementReview sample Team Charters |
| Class 3 of 14 9/25/23 | **Team Dynamics, cont.; Team Charters; Knowing the Client*** Discussion of importance of researching the client and understanding client internal dynamics. Prepare for the client kick-off meeting with an agenda and display of project understanding.
* Teams will meet to organize and revise team charter, agree on
 | **Between Tues 9/26 & Fri 10/6: Conduct kick-off meeting with client.*** Articulate meeting objectives
* Finalize meeting agenda
* Post-meeting: summarize meeting with memo to faculty advisor and post to Brightspace
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| **Class Date (Mondays)** | **Class Topic and Description** | **Assignments Due**(all assignments are due to faculty advisor in advance of class unlessotherwise noted) |
|  | gathering initial information about the client, and prepare for the client kick-off meeting. | **Due Mon 10/2: Submit draft Team Charter to faculty advisor**. Be prepared to talk about proposed team member roles inclass. |
| Class 4 of 14 10/02/23 | **No Formal Class.** Faculty Advisors available to meet with teams to review current work tasks. | Review sample Scope Agreements |
| Class 5 of 14 Tuesday, 10/10/23(Legislative Monday) | **Scope Agreement (Contract), Schedule, and Internal Workplan*** Class will focus on elements of a successful client engagement, including scope agreement, research methods/approach\* and project management including internal project timeline/schedule and deliverables.
* Once completed and agreed upon with the client, the Scope Agreement will constitute the “contract” for the Capstone project.

\*Depending on the project, methods may include using census data, interviewing, surveys, observation, focus groups, and other methods and their application tospecific projects. | **Submit revised Team Charter** based on classmate and advisor feedback, and experience working together thus far.**Submit Draft Scope Agreement**. Draft Scope Agreement should include a clear statement of the problem, a data needs and methods section, and a section on key milestones/deliverables.Post kick-off meeting, communicate with client to present and negotiate Scope Agreement. Scope may need to be revisedafter client feedback. |
| Class 6 of 14 10/16/23 | **Guest Lecturer TBD: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion****Project Management and Workplan, cont.; Introduction to Existing Conditions Memo / Interim Deliverable**Teams, during class: Begin drafting Workplan | **Submit Final Scope Agreement signed by client and countersigned by team members.** Post to Brightspace when finalized.Review sample workplans |

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| **Class Date (Mondays)** | **Class Topic and Description** | **Assignments Due**(all assignments are due to faculty advisor in advance of class unlessotherwise noted) |
| Class 7 of 14 10/23/23 | **Panel Discussion: “The Science & Art of Urban Planning Consulting”** | **Submit revised Workplan**Begin research |
| Class 8 of 14 10/30/23 | **No Formal Class.** Faculty Advisors available to meet with teams to reviewcurrent work tasks. | Research, cont. |
| Class 9 of 14 11/06/23 | **Team Presentations on Research Methods and Challenges (1 of 2)** Teams to present outline of information needs and research methods being used in fulfilling Scope Agreement with client, as well as any identified challenges with methods/approach todate. | Begin drafting Existing Conditions Memo/ Interim Deliverable |
| Class 10 of 14 11/13/23 | **Team Presentations on Research Methods and Challenges (2 of 2)** Teams to present outline of information needs and research methods being used in fulfilling Scope Agreement with client, as well as any identified challenges with methods/approach todate. |  |
| Class 11 of 14 11/20/23 | **NO CLASS** | **Due Wed 11/22:** Submit draft Existing Conditions Memo/InterimDeliverable |
| Class 12 of 14 11/27/23 | **No Formal Class.** Faculty Advisorsavailable to meet with teams to review current work tasks. | Ongoing: revise Existing Conditions Memo/Interim Deliverable based on facultyadvisor feedback |
| Class 13 of 14 12/04/23 | **Guest Lecturer: Emily Austin on writing a successful Capstone Report Outline** |  |
| Class 14 of 14 12/11/23 | **Last Class: First Semester Progress Assessment and Team Meetings** Self and Team Peer Evaluations.Faculty will meet with each team individually to review semester progress and highlight any issues forsecond semester. | Submit Final Existing Conditions/Interim Deliverable |

**January 2024 Term**

While classes don’t meet, this is generally an important time for group work, including travel as necessary. Students are expected to be available and working during this time (except for the holiday week through New Year’s Day). If faculty or team members are not available for some portion of this time, this should be made clear and discussed within each team, between team and faculty, and between team and client.

# Letter Grades

Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

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| **Letter Grade** | **Points** |
| **A** | 4.0 points |
| **A-** | 3.7 points |
| **B+** | 3.3 points |
| **B** | 3.0 points |
| **B-** | 2.7 points |
| **C+** | 2.3 points |
| **C** | 2.0 points |
| **C-** | 1.7 points |
| **F** | 0.0 points |

## Student grades will be assigned according to the following criteria:

1. **Excellent**: Exceptional work for a graduate student. Work at this level is unusually thorough, well-reasoned, creative, methodologically sophisticated, and well written. Work is of exceptional, professional quality.

**(A-) Very good**: Very strong work for a graduate student. Work at this level shows signs of creativity, is thorough and well-reasoned, indicates strong understanding of appropriate methodological or analytical approaches, and meets professional standards.

**(B+) Good**: Sound work for a graduate student; well-reasoned and thorough, methodologically sound. This is the graduate student grade that indicates the student has fully accomplished the basic objectives of the course.

1. **Adequate**: Competent work for a graduate student even though some weaknesses are evident. Demonstrates competency in the key course objectives but shows some indication that understanding of some important issues is less than complete. Methodological or analytical approaches used are adequate but student has not been thorough or has shown other weaknesses or limitations.

**(B-) Borderline**: Weak work for a graduate student; meets the minimal expectations for a graduate student in the course. Understanding of salient issues is somewhat incomplete. Methodological or analytical work performed in the course is minimally adequate. Overall performance, if consistent in graduate courses, would not suffice to sustain graduate status in “good standing.”

**(C/-/+) Deficient**: Inadequate work for a graduate student; does not meet the minimal expectations for a graduate student in the course. Work is inadequately developed or flawed by numerous errors and misunderstanding of important issues. Methodological or analytical work performed is weak and fails to demonstrate knowledge or technical competence expected of graduate students.

**(F) Fail**: Work fails to meet even minimal expectations for course credit for a graduate student. Performance has been consistently weak in methodology and understanding, with serious limits in many areas. Weaknesses or limits are pervasive.

# Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a vital component of Wagner and NYU. All students enrolled in this class are required to read and abide by [Wagner’s Academic Code](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/policies/code). All Wagner students have already read and signed the [Wagner Academic Oath](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/policies/academic-oath). Plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated and students in this class are expected to report violations to me. If any student in this class is unsure about what is expected of you and how to abide by the academic code, you should consult with me.

# Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at NYU

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please visit the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) website and click on the Reasonable Accommodations and How to Register tab or call or email CSD at (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are strongly advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

# NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays

[NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays](https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/university-calendar-policy-on-religious-holidays.html) states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious

obligations. Please notify me in advance of religious holidays that might coincide with exams to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives.