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

We will post all course documents, assignments and announcements on Blackboard and you are expected to be aware of all postings. Time sensitive additions to Blackboard may be accompanied by an e-mail alerting you to new postings.

Potential clients will present their projects to you September 21st. We will ask you for your preferences, but – just to be very clear – we will create the teams based not only on your preferences, but 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 and guest speakers, class discussion and team meetings. Course requirements include:
  o enrollment in both semesters;
  o attendance and participation in class activities and team meetings;
  o completion of assignments on time;
  o participation in field work;
  o participation in meetings with clients;
  o participation in preparation and presentation of findings.

Student presentations to the class, as identified periodically in the syllabus, should be prepared to be succinct, direct and focused.

Because this course will focus on projects outside of the New York Metropolitan Region, some client organizations may not be New York City based. This will necessitate use of teleconferencing/televideo conferencing for client meetings, depending on the facilities available to the client. Each team will have a $500 annual operating budget for project expenses. Some projects may require travel for field work which will usually take place during January and/or Spring break. NYU will offer supplemental travel funding for air/train travel for students who must travel outside NYC for project research. Although generous, supplemental travel funding rarely covers all student expenses.

EVALUATION and GRADING

Students will be given 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” to reflect the “work
in progress” nature of the year long project. We will assign final grades at the end of the second semester. 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.

- 50% of the 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.
- 50% of the 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.

**Final grades will be individual – that is, individual team members may receive different grades based upon their individual performance.**

**COURSE MILESTONES**

The course has a series of milestones – both activities and products -- that will serve as interim deliverables. We have 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:
- Individual learning goals (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 work agreement; presentation to class/faculty for feedback prior to client presentation (October/November);
- Meeting(s) with client to negotiate work agreement (October/November);
- Final, signed client-team work agreement and detailed team workplan (November);
- Team charter (November);
- End-of-first semester evaluations: self, team/peer, and course; discussion of team process and progress; refine individual learning goals (December);
- First draft of final project report to faculty (February);
- Second draft of final project report to faculty (March);
- Oral presentation of final report to 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 evaluations: self, team /peer, client and course (end April);
• Presentation for end event (May).

REQUIRED TEXTS
• Peter Block, Flawless Consulting, 4th Edition
• Readings will be assigned throughout the year.

CLASS SCHEDULE: FIRST SEMESTER

The list of weeks and topics that follows is preliminary and subject to change. Students should expect to meet in class weekly, as a class or team, unless otherwise agreed upon by faculty. After teams are established, classes will begin with 5-10 minutes of class discussion concerning current issues (longer if necessary) and then, reassembling chairs, convene as separate teams.

WEEK 1: September 14
Overview and introductions: Review the syllabus and clarify course structure and expectations. Analyze the case study (Getting To Yes) in teams and then as a class.

WEEK 2: September 21

To accommodate our need for more space for Client Presentations, this class will be held at THE SUPPORT CENTER at 305 7th AVENUE (AT 27TH STREET), 11TH FLOOR, Conference Room to the right as you exit the elevator.

Potential clients have been invited to describe their organization and their project. Students are encouraged to ask clarifying questions to make sure you understand the client’s needs and limitations, and equally importantly, the clients organizational culture, which includes access to organization data and the availability of client representatives.

➢ Assignments for Week 3 on September 28
  o Prepare ½ to 1 page memo on why you are qualified to work on each of your top 3 choices. Include a description of relevant skills that may not be clear from your resume and any time or geographic constraints you may have. Please email your resume and this memo to us by Thursday, September 24.

WEEK 3: September 28 This is Yom Kippur. Depending on potential absences, we may cancel class and attempt to re-schedule.
Project team assignments announced. Team-building exercise. Teams establish a few basic ground rules about how to operate. Then teams discuss approach to gathering initial information about the client. Discuss individual learning goals.

- **Assignments for Week 4 on October 5:**
  - Bring in background information on your client for team and class discussion.
  - Flawless Consulting (read in this order): Preface to the first edition (pp. xxi-xxiv), chapter 19, and then chapters 1, 2 and 3.
  - Individual Learning Goals. Please email this to us by Sunday October 3rd.

- **Assignment:** schedule and conduct initial client meeting during the period from October 6-15. Faculty must attend the meeting

**WEEK 4: October 5**
We will focus on preparation 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 5 on October 12:**
  - All students: Flawless Consulting, chapters 4 and 5.
  - Teams that have met with their client: Submit 2-page memo summarizing the team’s findings from their assessment meeting, including a clear statement of the problem to be addressed for the client. Be prepared to present to class.

**WEEK 5: October 12 [This is Columbus Day but NYU is not closed. We will have class.]**
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 have met with their client.

- **Assignment for Week 6 on October 19:**
  - 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.

**WEEK 6: October 19**
We will hear from teams that met with their client. If necessary, will continue discussion of work agreements and workplans. Teams will work on their client-team work agreement and internal workplan.

- **Assignment for Week 7 on October 26:**
  - 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 faculty by Sunday night, October 25.
Assignment: schedule meeting with client to present and negotiate work agreement during the period from November 4 to November 12. Faculty must attend these meetings.

WEEK 7: October 26
Team meetings with faculty to review assignments. Teams continue to develop work agreement and workplan.

Assignment for Week 8 on November 2:
- 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 faculty by Sunday night, November 1.

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

WEEK 9: November 9
Those teams that have met with clients present the results of the meeting. Begin 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 re-designing the elements you want to change.

Assignment for Week 10 on November 16:
- Final written work plan agreed with client. This must be signed by the client and team.

WEEK 10: November 16
Those teams that have met with clients present the results of the meeting. Continue work on team charters.

Assignments for Week 11 on November 23:
- Team charter due.
- Flawless Consulting, chapters 10 and 11

WEEK 11: November 23
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 12: November 30
If needed, more info on data gathering methods. Team meetings.

Individual Assignment for Week 13 on December 7:
End-of-semester written self-assessment, peer review of team members and feedback for faculty on the course.

WEEK 13: December 7
Team meetings. Faculty will participate.

WEEK 14: December 14
We will review course feedback. Team meetings.
We will meet with each team individually to review progress, discuss results of peer evaluations, discuss the work that will be done over the break, and highlight any issues for second semester.

CLASS SCHEDULE: SECOND SEMESTER

During this semester, much of the time will be set aside for teams to meet on their own and with faculty. The main emphasis is on working with teams toward the final products, and 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, we have posted some potential deadlines, but these are preliminary and could change.

Week 1: January 25, 2010
Class meeting: Will discuss schedule for the spring semester; also each team will provide a verbal progress report. Identify needs for any instructional sessions.

➢ Assignment for Week 2 on February 1:
  o Revised individual learning goals
  o Revised team workplan

Week 2: February 1
Class meeting: Check in on team dynamics; possible need to revise team charters. Also, team meeting time.

➢ Assignment for Week 3 on February 8:
  o Flawless Consulting, chapter 13

Week 3: February 8
Class meeting: Discussion of formats and language for final presentations and final reports. Also, team meeting time.

➢ Assignment for Week 4 on February 22
  o First draft of final report

[February 15 – PRESIDENT'S DAY – NO CLASS.]

Week 4: February 22 – Group Presentation Skills Workshop by Will Carlin
Week 5: March 1
Class meeting: Discuss first drafts of final reports. Also, team meeting time.

➢ Assignments for Week 8 on March 22
  o Second draft of final report
  o Draft slides for final presentation

Week 6: March 8 – Team meeting time

Week 7: March 15 – SPRING BREAK

Week 8: March 22 – Team meeting time

➢ Assignment for Week 9 on March 29:
  o Flawless Consulting, chapter 14

➢ Assignment: Each team should schedule their final presentations to the clients during the period between April 7 and April 19. Faculty should be present.

Week 9: March 29 [This is Passover; we may cancel or re-schedule class.]
Class meeting: Discuss second drafts of final reports and drafts of slides. Also discuss managing the client meeting.

Week 10: April 5
Class meeting: Team rehearsals of final presentations

Week 11: April 12
Class meeting: Team rehearsals of final presentations

Week 12: April 19
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 14 on May 3:
  o Final Project Report
  o Final Team and Self Evaluations: Please get these to faculty by Sunday, April 25.

Week 13: April 26 – Team meeting time

Week 14: May 3
Take a step back and reflect on the year’s work. Celebration!

Capstone End Event: Wednesday May 5, 201 from 5:00-6:30 pm