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 have identified an array of potential projects. Potential clients will present their projects to you in the first couple of weeks in class. 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 usually comprised of 3-5 students.

The class will involve presentations from the instructor, course consultant 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.

Because this course will focus on international projects, some client organizations may not be US based. This will necessitate use of teleconferencing/televideo conferencing for client meetings, depending on the facilities available to the client. Some projects may require international field work which will usually take place during January or Spring break. We will make every effort to secure financial support for travel if such work is necessary, but it may not cover the full costs.
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. I 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. Just as you will rehearse and prepare for oral presentations, I urge and expect you to re-read, proof and possibly ask another person to proof your writing before submission. Each of you will receive an individual grade, that is, individual team members could receive different grades.

COURSE MILESTONES

The course has a series of milestones – both activities and products -- that will serve as interim deliverables. We’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:

- Individual learning goals (September/October);
- Team charter (October/November);
- “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 6 – October 15);
- 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 (November 4 – November 12);
- Final, signed client-team work agreement and detailed team workplan (November 16);
• 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 22);
• Second draft of final project report to faculty (March 22);
• 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
Other readings as assigned.

CLASS SCHEDULE: FIRST SEMESTER

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
Overview and introductions: Get to know each other a bit. Review the syllabus and clarify course structure and expectations. Begin client presentations about their projects.

WEEK 2: September 21
Continue with client presentations. Students list their preferences. Provide information on team dynamics (building on MPSO and Capstone Advanced Team Seminar.)

➢ Assignments for Week 3 on September 28
  o Prepare ½ to 1 page memo on why you are qualified to work on your top 2 choices. Please email this to me by Thursday, September 24.
  o Individual learning goals. Please email this to me by Sunday night, September 27.

WEEK 3: September 28 [This is Yom Kippur. Depending on potential absences, we may cancel class and attempt to re-schedule.]
Project teams announced. Review individual learning goals. 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.
Assignments for Week 4 on October 5:
- Bring in background information on your client for team and class discussion.
- Flawless Consulting, 2nd edition (read in this order): Preface to the first edition (pp. xxi-xxiv), chapter 19, and then chapters 1, 2 and 3.

Assignment: schedule and conduct initial client meeting during the period from October 6-15. I must be present at 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: 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 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 met with client.

Assignments 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, we will continue discussion of work agreements and workplans. Teams will work on their client-team work agreement and internal workplan.

Assignments 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 me 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. I must attend these meetings.

WEEK 7: October 26
Team meetings with professor to review assignments. Teams continue to work on work agreement and workplan.
➢ Assignment for Week 8 on November 2:
   o 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 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:
   o Final written work plan agreed with client. This should 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:
   o Team charter due.
   o 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:
   o End-of-semester written self-assessment, peer review of team members and feedback for me on the course.

WEEK 13: December 7
Team meetings. I will be available as needed.
WEEK 14: December 14
I will review course feedback. Team meetings. I will meet with each team individually to review progress, discuss results of peer evaluations, 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 or with me. The main emphasis is on time spent working with teams and 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’ve 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:
  - Revised individual learning goals
  - 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:
  - 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
  - First draft of final report

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

Week 4: February 22 – Team meeting time
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. I 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 me 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: DATE TBA