NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE
CAPSTONE SYLLABUS
Advanced Project in International Policy and Management    P11.3126 (004)
Fall 2008/Spring 2010 – Mondays form 6:45 – 8:25 p.m.

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COURSE SUMMARY AND OBJECTIVES

Capstone is learning in action. Part of the core curriculum of the Masters program and the Wagner School, 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 – either to address challenges, solve problems and identify opportunities for a client organization or to conduct research on a pressing social question. Ultimately, Capstone contributes not only to the student’s education, but is a university resource for the public good.

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 integrating and enhancing student learning in several different arenas: a content or issue area, key process skills including project management and teamwork, and methods for gathering, analyzing and reporting data. 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 each student will be assigned to a team, the class will work as a learning community dedicated to the success of all the projects.

Projects have been developed that represent important contributions both to the client organization and the field of international public service policy and management. Students will be assigned to a project team based on a number of factors including student preference and expertise as well as team size. Teams are usually comprised of 3-5 students who bring a mix of skills and experience and have expressed an interest in the project. To the degree possible, students will get their first or second choice of project.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Capstone integrates and enhances learning in several arenas: a content of issue area, process skills including project, client and team management and research methods for gathering, analyzing and reporting data. The learning objectives are as follows:
A. **CONTENT**  
Students will be able to:  
- Understand the policy context for their project;  
- Become familiar with specialized vocabularies required to perform the project successfully;  
- Become aware of critical research related to their content area; and  
- Become 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 project work agreement with the client;  
   - Develop a project work plan with timelines and deliverables;  
   - Monitor their progress against the work plan;  
   - Revise the work plan as necessary; and  
   - 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 project work plan with timelines and deliverables (the “contract”);  
   - Maintain regular and productive contact with the client;  
   - Solicit and integrate feedback on progress against the contract and modify as necessary; and  
   - Deliver final product to client’s satisfaction...

3. **Team Management**  
   Students should demonstrate the ability to:  
   - Understand group formulation 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;  
   - Solicit and offer feedback; and  
   - Appreciate and learn from cultural differences.
C. **RESEARCH**

Students should demonstrate the ability to:

- Conduct a critical review of the literature relevant to the project;
- Identify and 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;
- Follow established sampling procedures to create appropriate samples for their particular project;
- Identify and implement appropriate quantitative and/or qualitative data gathering and analysis methods for their particular project;
- Situate their findings in the broader related literature;
- Draw conclusions based on their findings; and
- Communicate their work effectively both orally and in writing.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

The class will involve presentations from the instructor, class discussions and team meetings both with and without the instructor. Team meetings in addition to the Saturday sessions are required and will be scheduled as needed by each individual team. Course requirements include:

- Enrollment in both semesters;
- Attendance and participation in class activities and team meetings;
- Completions of assignments on time;
- Participation in field work;
- Participation in meetings with client; and
- Participation in preparation and presentation of findings.

**EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Final grades are assigned at the end of the second semester. Students are graded on both the products they deliver to their clients and evidence of progressive learning compared to course objectives throughout the process. The course has a series of milestones that will serve as interim work products.

**COURSE MILESTONES**

Students are encouraged to set learning goals for themselves at the beginning of the course; these can be modified at the beginning of the second semester based on feedback from the instructor, peers and their own self-assessment.

In addition there are a consistent set of milestones (activities and products) that are required of students. Some suggested time frames for selected milestones are found in parenthesis, though actual timing during the course of the year may vary depending on the specific situation of each team and client.
These milestones include:

- development of team norms/team charter (September);
- “entry” conference with the client to explain the process of the course, establish relationship, assess the client organization and gain data to clarify the presenting problem or issue and client’s initial vision of a successful project (October);
- summary by team of first meeting with the client and clear statement of the problem (October);
- development of preliminary work agreement and work plan; presentation to instructor for feedback prior to client presentation (October/November);
- End of first semester self. Team/peer and course evaluation; discussion of team process and progress (December);
- outline of final project report to instructor (February);
- oral presentation of final report to class/instructor for feedback prior to presentation to client (March-April);
- final report and presentation to client with instructor (March-April);
- end-of-semester reflection positioning project in larger issue context (end April);
- end-of-course self, team/peer and course evaluation (end April); and
- presentation for end event (May).

**ROLE OF INSTRUCTOR**

In addition to the instructor’s role in presenting material and facilitating class discussions, she is available to each team for consultation and advisement. The instructor is also responsible for giving each team on-going feedback to ensure that the project is on track and will result in a high quality product for the client. The instructor may be consulted by team members if team dynamics require discussion at any point in the process. Communication with the instructor should be early and often.

**GRADING**

Students will be given two credits for the fall semester and two for the spring semester of Capstone. It is the custom in Capstone to report end of first semester grades as IP to reflect the “work in progress: nature of the year long project.

**Grading Criteria:** 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 as well as on their individual contributions to the team’s products.

- 65% 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 instructor.
- 35% is based on evidence of the individual student’s contributions to those products and his/her learning during the course through participation in the team’s work, class activities and his/her ability to act on peer and instructor’s feedback. This includes team norms/charter, individual and team preparation for client meetings, end of semester feedback from instructor, peers and self-assessment, demonstration throughout the course of progress and final products and presentations to client.
READINGS


Readings will be assigned to each team that are specific to their project.

CLASS CALENDAR AND DELIVERABLE DUE DATES (FALL 2007)

9/14 Course Introductions
Overview of the course and introductions. Course experience and requirements will be reviewed. An overview of available projects will be presented.

9/21 Vetting Projects
More in-depth discussions of the available projects will be presented; where possible, clients will be in class to answer questions.

*On or before 9/25 First Assignment Due Via E-Mail to Instructor as a Word Attachment
Each participant to submit a 1-2 page essay describing: (a) your first choice of project – why do you want to work on this project and what qualifications do you bring?; (2) second choice of project – why do you want to work on this project and what qualifications do you bring?; and (3) what concerns, if any, you have about being a productive team member for your chosen projects. Also please attach a recent resume.

9/28 First Team Meeting, Team Charter Development Assignments, Preparing for Initial Client Meeting
• Assigning teams and roles within teams
• Developing the team charter
• Project development overview
• Preparing for the first client meeting – developing the agenda

*By September 30 – Each team should submit its team charter to the instructor via e-mail.

Between 9/29 – 10/12, each team should have held its first client meeting. Once that meeting/initial communication has taken place, the team should write a memo summarizing the meeting to distribute and present to the class, including a clear statement of the project (2 paragraphs).
10/5  Report on First Client Meeting and Discussion/Developing Workplans
A presentation will be made on work plan development (including a template); Teams will then work individually with the instructor in the beginning preparation of the work plan. Teams that have held their first client meeting will report.

10/12  No class (teams may use the classroom and time period for meeting/work plan development)

10/19  First draft of work plans due
Teams that have not yet reported on their initial client meeting will do so. The work plan discussion will also continue, with the instructor providing feedback on drafts.

10/26  Finalizing Work Plans/ Presentation of Research Methods
Presentation will be made on research methods (including literature reviews, surveys/questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, critical incidents). Each team should have a final work plan.

11/2  Individual Team Meetings with Instructor
11/9  Individual Team Meetings with Instructor
11/16 Individual Team Meetings with Instructor

11/23  Presentation of Projects-to-date to the class

12/7  Individual team meetings with instructor re: review of first deliverable

12/14  Full Class Debrief of Projects
Each team will present the status of its project and reflect with the team and the class on the first semester’s experiences. This will include formative assessments of team, self and instructor.

Requirements to be met by 12/14:
- An approved work plan;
- Completion of the first deliverable (approved by the instructor and the client);
- Team status report; and
- A detailed approach for January – April 2008.
A Preview of the Spring Semester

The second semester will be structured to allow for regular check-ins between each team and the instructor and periodic consultations and information-sharing among the teams. Presentations will be made to address content/process areas and skills-building. The main emphasis is on time spent by each team on its individual project and frequent communication with the instructor as the project moves forward.

Project implementation processes through January and February. By the end of February, each team should have a detailed outline of the final deliverable. March is usually spent writing/editing the final report. There will be a Group Presentation Skills Workshop on March 1 from 6:45 – 8:25 in the Rudin Family Forum on the second floor of The Puck Building.

Revising and editing takes place in April. Feedback from the instructor takes place throughout that process. In early April, once the instructor has approved, the draft is shared with the client. By mid April, the client’s feedback has been incorporated and the team develops its presentation of the final product for presentation to the client and to the class (with clients) and the Capstone End Event Exhibition on May 5, 2010, from 5:00 – 6:30 (location TBA).