New York University
Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service

International Capstone:
Advanced Projects in Public Finance, Planning and Policy

P11.3126/7 (001-002)      Fall 2009/Spring 2010
Monday, 6:45 p.m.      Silver 706/Silver 718

Faculty/Contacts/Office Hours

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by appointment       and by appointment  and by appointment

Course Overview

This is a two-term course in which students work in teams as consultants for a client public or non-profit service agency focused on international issues. There are four sections of the international capstone course. This section offers a range of finance, planning and policy related projects. Many projects, however, cannot be neatly defined and cut across finance, management, policy and planning boundaries. Accordingly, students may, with permission from the instructors, cross sections when appropriate given student interests and client needs. Students will be advised of possible options to do so early in the semester.

The main purpose of this course is to provide students with an opportunity to define a problem and develop solutions for the client as part of a team. Students will design the approach, conduct the data collection and analysis, and present the team’s findings to the professor and the client, both orally (where feasible) and in writing.

This course builds to various degrees on previous core and specialization courses at Wagner, integrating and applying lessons from these courses throughout the year-long effort. Learning will also come from periodic shared experiences in class as the course progresses.

Note that although this is a graduate school course, our collective goal is to simulate as much as possible the professional world, including its uncertainties and the need to work closely with teammates and clients to meet the desired objectives.

Major Learning Objectives

Classroom discussion and team coaching will focus on three major areas:

1. How to design and execute a year-long project for an organization requesting assistance
   • Define and analyze a real organizational or system problem
   • Design and execute a detailed work plan for exploring appropriate alternatives
   • Collect, analyze and organize relevant data from multiple sources
   • Respond appropriately to client needs, requests, and expectations
2. How to successfully manage an external client and assorted stakeholders
   - Understand how organizations work and the prevailing institutional culture
   - Prepare and present clear, well-written, on-time interim and final reports for a client (both oral and written)

3. How to function as a member of a client-facing consulting team
   - Manage communication between the team and the client (accepting the constraints faced by the client and the desired frequency and method of communication)
   - Contribute effectively to the team’s process and progress
   - Resolve internal team conflicts constructively and in timely manner

Team Assignments

Students will be assigned to a project based on a number of factors, including student preference, client preference, academic preparation, work experience, and required team size. Teams are usually comprised of three to six students who bring a mix of skills and experience and have expressed an interest in the project.

Summary of Course Expectations

1. Enrollment in both semesters
2. Attendance and participation in required class activities and team meetings
3. Completion of assignments on time
4. Participation of all team members in fieldwork (where applicable), meetings with the client, and presentation of findings to the professor and client
5. Attendance at the capstone end event in May 2010

Course Format

The class utilizes a varied and flexible set of learning methods:

1. Presentations given by faculty or visiting experts as needed
2. Facilitated class discussions
3. Selected readings from textbooks/reference sources/journal articles
4. Team meetings (during and outside of class)
5. Professor/team consultations (during class; outside of class as needed)
6. Experiential learning
7. Self reflection and self evaluation

Evaluation Criteria

Grades are assigned at the end of the academic year (incomplete interim grades of “satisfactory” or unsatisfactory” are assigned at the end of the fall semester). Students are graded on:

1. All work products/submitted assignments generated by the team (70 percent of grade; same grade given to all team members)
   - Product and project management
     i. Project deliverables, including: team task definition statement, draft work plan, individual issues paper, agreed-on progress reports, revised work
ii. **Timeliness** of work assignments

- Client satisfaction, as determined by a final written evaluation done by the client of the content and presentation of oral and written reports

2. Students’ individual performance as a member of a consulting team (30 percent of grade; *can result in the adjustment of individual final grades*)

- Evidence of learning throughout the course
- Individual contribution to the team/class discussions
- Written peer evaluations of team members
- Written self evaluation memo

**Overview of Class Format**

1. Although *some teams will be following a more accelerated schedule to meet the needs of their specific clients or team preferences*, the emphasis during the fall semester will generally be on *facilitation of team start-up*. The spring semester will focus more heavily on *project activities*.

2. A portion of a few classes will be used as needed for *skill-building sessions* that will help the teams produce the highest-quality projects on a timely basis.

3. Almost all class meeting periods will have time set aside for *professor/team consultations* and teams are also expected to meet professors by appointment outside of the class period as needed.

4. Students should generally *expect to meet weekly* as a team, although there may be some weeks when it is not necessary to meet or weeks where it is necessary to hold multiple meetings.

**Assignments**

To complete the requirements for the workshop, students must hand in 6 written assignments: (1) a team task definition statement (inception report), (2) a team charter; (3) a team work plan/agreement; (4) mid-year evaluation and (optional) individual issues paper; (5) a final team report; and (6) final course, peer and self evaluations. Only the final report is formally graded.

Further details on each assignment will be discussed in class. In order to manage the flow of reports and to ensure Spring 2010 graduation, it is essential that teams meet the deadlines. **Failure to do it may lead to the postponement of graduation for all team members!** It is important to emphasize that the following schedule is illustrative—*some clients may require earlier deadlines*.

**(1) TEAM TASK DEFINITION STATEMENT/INCEPTION REPORT**

**Deadline** October 12, 2009

**Length:** Approximately 5-6 pages of text; attachments as needed.

The team task definition statement/inception report involves clarifying what needs to be done to develop a full work plan. It is based on the project terms of reference and initial discussions with clients, organizational diagnoses of clients, and assessments of team member skills.
(2) TEAM CHARTER

Deadline: October 12, 2009
Length: Approximately 2-3 pages of text.

A team charter is a summary of your project team’s objectives, structure and work practices. It should reflect the input and consensus of all team members and should address how you interact with each other, with your client, and with your faculty member. Making these shared agreements explicit by writing them down makes them crystal clear. It also provides a mechanism through which you can hold team members accountable. Since the agreements have been publicly acknowledged and accepted, they are binding on all team members. As an indication of this, all team members must sign the charter before you hand it in.

(3) WORK PLAN

Deadline: November 16, 2009 (Draft); December 14, 2009 (Final)
Length: 5-10 pages of text; attachments as needed.

The client and instructor must approve the work plan. It should contain the project design, the assignment of tasks to team members, and a schedule for completing the tasks. The sooner this can be accomplished, the better. The final deadline is an outside date; it is intended to allow time between client consultations and finalization of the research plans and for revisions before the semester ends. Failure to meet this deadline may jeopardize the team's ability to meet the final report deadlines.

(4) MID-YEAR EVALUATIONS/ INDIVIDUAL ISSUES PAPER

Deadline: December 14, 2009
Length: Completion of evaluation forms; 3-5 pages for issues paper (optional)

The individual issues paper (optional) is intended for those who wish to add to their mid-year evaluation response, i.e. to raise issues about capstone and their specific role on the capstone team.

(5) FINAL TEAM REPORT

Deadline: March 22, 2010 (Draft); April 26, 2010 (Final)
Length: Varies as per client needs; attachments as necessary

There are 3 steps toward the final report: (1) a report on work progress in January 2010, which can be mainly oral; (2) a first draft of the final report due no later than March 22, 2010 (to allow time for faculty and client comments); (3) the final report due on April 26, 2010. Only the final report will be formally graded. This deadline is necessary to meet the University graduation deadlines. Class sessions in April may be used as rehearsals for the final professional presentations when needed.

(6) FINAL COURSE EVALUATIONS/PEER EVALUATIONSS/SELF-EVALUATIONS

Deadline: May 4, 2010
Length: Completion of forms

Each individual must complete course, peer and self-evaluation forms supplied by the instructors.
NOTE: This schedule is tentative and may need to be modified. Students will be notified in advance of any modifications to the schedule. The individual schedules for some capstone teams may also have to be modified to meet the needs of particular clients that have to meet earlier deadlines.

CAPITAL LETTERS INDICATE MAJOR ASSIGNMENT OR CAPSTONE MILESTONE

PRELIMINARY FALL 2009 SCHEDULE

Sept. 14   Introduction of capstone course and course participants, review of project opportunities
Sept. 21   Continued review and discussion of project opportunities; student preferences
Sept. 28   Project selection and team formation
Oct. 5     Getting started: organizational and task diagnosis/negotiating with clients/initial contact with clients
Oct. 12    TEAM TASK DEFINITION STATEMENT (INCEPTION REPORT) AND TEAM CHARTER DUE
Oct. 19    Work plan preparation
Oct. 26-   Individual team meetings and or skills/issues sessions; DRAFT WORK PLAN DUE ON 11/16
Nov. 16    Team work plan submitted to clients and discussed/revised as needed.
Nov. 23-   DEADLINE FOR FINAL APPROVAL OF PROJECT DESIGNS AND WORK-PLANS BY FACULTY AND
Dec. 7     CLIENTS; MID-YEAR EVALUATION FORMS AND INDIVIDUAL ISSUES PAPERS (OPTIONAL) DUE

PRELIMINARY SPRING 2010 SCHEDULE

Jan. 19-   Progress reports/problem-solving sessions/individual team meetings
Feb. 8     No Class (Presidents Day Holiday)
Feb. 23-   Individual team meetings and report drafting
Mar. 8     No Class (Spring Break Week)
Mar. 15    DRAFT OF FINAL REPORT DUE; Individual team meetings
Mar. 22    Report revisions/rehearse final presentations as needed/schedule presentations to clients as required
Mar. 29-   FINAL WRITTEN CAPSTONE REPORT DUE ***DEADLINE***
Apr. 19    May 3     Final reports to clients/preparation for Capstone End Event
Apr. 26    PEER EVALUATIONS AND SELF-EVALUATIONS DUE
May 5     NYU/WAGNER SCHOOL-WIDE CAPSTONE END EVENT, 5:00-6:30 p.m.