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

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

P11.3126/7, Section 1  Paul Smoke
Fall 2010/Spring 2011  3052 Puck Building
Monday, 6:45 p.m.       212-998-7497
194 Mercer Street, 307   paul.smoke@nyu.edu

Office hours: Tuesday, 4:00-6:00 p.m. and by appointment

Course Overview

This is a two-term course in which students work in teams on consulting assignments for a public or non-profit service agency (capstone client) focused on international development. This year’s version offers a range of finance, planning and policy related projects. Many projects, however, cannot be neatly defined and cut across multiple areas, so that most teams will be composed of members with different interests and from more than one Wagner program/specialization.

The main purpose of capstone is to provide students with an opportunity to define and analyze a problem, present their analytical findings and develop solutions for the client as part of a team. Students will design the approach, conduct data collection and analysis, and present the findings to the faculty advisors and the clients through a presentation (if feasible) and a written report.

An important goal of capstone 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. Students must expect some changes to their initial plans. There will invariably be challenges along the way, and the team must be flexible and adaptable.

All capstone students are expected to familiarize themselves with the capstone requirements outlined in the Capstone Student Guide, which is posted on Blackboard and available from the NYU/Wagner website

Major Learning Objectives

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

1. How to design and execute an extended project for a client organization
   • Identify with the client a real organizational or policy issue/problem
   • Design and execute a detailed work plan for analyzing the issue
   • Implement the work plan (including participation in fieldwork)
   • Prepare and present clear, well organized, and effective on-time interim and final reports for a client (both oral and written)

2. How to successfully work with a client and relevant stakeholders
   • Understand how organizations work and how to work effectively in the prevailing institutional culture
   • Respond appropriately to client needs and expectations during implementation
3. How to function as a member of a consulting team working for a client
   • Manage team-client communication (accepting the constraints faced by the client and the team and the client’s desired frequency and method of communication)
   • Contribute effectively to the team’s process and tasks
   • Resolve internal team conflicts constructively and in timely manner

4. How to conduct effective applied research
   • Identify and carry out data collection methods appropriate for a particular project, potentially including surveys and questionnaires, individual interviews, focus groups, and use of existing datasets;
   • Follow sampling procedures (where relevant) for a particular project;
   • Identify and implement appropriate quantitative and/or qualitative analysis;
   • Situate the findings from the project in the broader related literature;
   • Draw conclusions based on the findings and identify possible future research.

Team Assignments

Students are assigned to a particular 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 five 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 all assignments on time
4. Equitable participation of all team members in planning and executing the fieldwork, meeting the client and faculty advisor, preparing deliverables and presenting findings
5. Attendance at the capstone end event in May 2011

Course Format

The course meets weekly. The course 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. Faculty/team consultations (during class; outside of class as needed)
6. Experiential learning
7. Self reflection and self evaluation

Once the teams are formed and some basic material is covered, most of the weekly class periods will be devoted to team meetings and team consultations with the faculty advisor.

Evaluation Criteria

Grades are assigned at the end of the full course (incomplete interim grades of “satisfactory” or unsatisfactory” are assigned for the summer 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: draft work plan, fieldwork report, other agreed-on progress reports, revised work plan; draft final report, revised final report.
     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 may follow a more accelerated or extended schedule to meet the needs of their client or team preferences, the emphasis during the fall will be on facilitation of team start-up, background work, and (where applicable) fieldwork preparation. Teams conducting fieldwork will generally do so in January. The spring semester will focus primarily on drafting and revising the final report.

2. A portion of a limited number of class meetings will be used as needed for skill-building sessions that will help the teams produce high quality projects on a timely basis.

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

4. Students should also generally expect to meet weekly as a team, although there may be some weeks when it is not necessary to meet or when multiple meetings (in person or virtual) are required. These meetings need not always occur during the regular class period or in the classroom if the team members collectively agree to another time and place, but students should arrange their schedules so that they are available to meet during that time.

**Assignments**

To complete course requirements, students must hand in 6 written assignments: (1) a team task definition statement/inception report (only required if the client does not provided a detailed terms of reference—see below) and team charter; (2) a team work plan/agreement; (3) mid-course evaluations; (4) team progress (or field research) report; (5) a final team report; and (6) final 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 that all team members will be able to graduate in Spring 2011, it is essential that all teams meet the specified deadlines.
It is important to emphasize that the following schedule is illustrative—some clients may require earlier or later deadlines.

(1) TEAM TASK DEFINITION STATEMENT/INCEPTION REPORT (IF NEEDED) AND TEAM CHARTER

**Deadline**  October 18, 2010

**Length:**  Approximately 2-3 pages of text each.

The team task definition statement/inception report involves clarifying what needs to be done to develop a full work plan and is *required only if the client did not initially provide a clearly defined task*. It is based on the project terms of reference and initial discussions with clients, organizational diagnoses of clients, and assessments of team member skills.

A team charter is a summary of the team’s objectives, structure and work practices (see template and samples on Blackboard). It should reflect a consensus of all team members and indicate how you will interact with each other, your client, and faculty advisor. The purpose of a written agreement is to make procedures clear and to provide a mechanism with which to hold team members accountable. All team members must sign the charter and the terms are binding.

(2) WORK PLAN

**Deadline**  November 14, 2010 (Draft); December 15 (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 (see template and samples on Blackboard). 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 fieldwork begins. Failure to meet this deadline may jeopardize the team's ability to travel to the field and meet other deadlines.

(3) MID-YEAR COURSE/PEER/SELF EVALUATIONS

**Deadline**  December 15, 2010

**Length**  Completion of evaluation forms

Each individual must complete a set of course, peer (one for each other team member) and self-evaluation forms posted on Blackboard.

(4) TEAM PROGRESS (OR FIELD RESEARCH) REPORT

**Deadline**  January 31, 2011

**Length**  10-20 pages of text; attachments as needed

Each team must write up preliminary results and questions emanating from their work in the first semester and between semesters (including field research where applicable) in a format agreed on with their faculty advisor and client. These field research reports will serve the basis for initial discussions with the client and faculty advisor at the beginning of the spring semester and will help to clarify the content and format of the final report.
(5) **Final Team Report**

**Deadline**  
March 28, 2011 (Draft); May 2, 2011 (Final)

**Length**  
Varies as per client needs; attachments as necessary

There are 3 steps toward the final report: (1) the team field research report (see above) submitted in January 2011; (2) a first draft of the final report due no later than March 28, 2011 (to allow adequate time for faculty and client comments); (3) the final report due on May 2, 2011. Only the final report will be formally graded. Class sessions in April may be used as rehearsals for the final professional presentations when needed.

(6) **Final Course/Peer/Self-Evaluations**

**Deadline**  
May 5, 2011

**Length:**  
Completion of evaluation forms

Each individual must complete peer (one for each team member) and self-evaluation forms posted on Blackboard. The final course evaluation is conducted online by the NYU/Wagner administration just like for any other course. Each registered class member will receive instructions by email about how to access and complete the course evaluation forms.

**Capstone Expenses**

Each capstone team is entitled to be reimbursed for up to $500 of capstone related expenses, such as photocopying, phone calls, etc. The form needed to claim for the expenses and a detailed explanation of eligible expenses and reimbursement procedures and deadlines is provided in the Capstone Student Guide and posted on Blackboard.

Capstone teams that travel are also eligible to apply for assistance with air or rail ticket expenses. The application for such funding is provided on the Blackboard site. The form needed to claim for approved expenses and a detailed explanation of eligible expenses and reimbursement procedures is provided in the Capstone Student Guide and posted on Blackboard.
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 2010 SCHEDULE

Sept. 13  Introduction of capstone course and course participants, review of project opportunities
Sept. 20  Continued review and discussion of project opportunities; student preferences
Sept. 27  Project selection and team formation
Oct. 4   Getting started: organizational and task diagnosis/negotiating with clients/initial contact with clients
Oct. 11  Columbus Day Holiday (No class)
Oct. 18  TEAM TASK DEFINITION STATEMENT (INCEPTION REPORT) AND TEAM CHARTER DUE
Oct. 25  Work plan preparation
Oct. 25- Nov. 15 Work plan preparation and individual team meetings; DRAFT WORK PLAN DUE ON 11/15
Nov. 22- Dec. 6 Team work plan submitted to clients and discussed/revised as needed.
Dec. 15 DEADLINE FOR FINAL APPROVAL OF PROJECT DESIGNS AND WORK-PLANS BY FACULTY AND CLIENTS; MID-YEAR EVALUATION FORMS DUE (Note that December 15 is a Wednesday but Monday classes meet, so there are two class meetings (13th and 15th) that week).

PRELIMINARY SPRING 2011 SCHEDULE

Jan. 24- Feb. 14 Progress reports/problem-solving sessions/team meetings; PROGRESS (FIELD) REPORT DUE ON 1/31
Feb. 21  No Class (Presidents Day Holiday)
Feb. 28- Mar. 7 Individual team meetings and report drafting
Mar. 14  No Class (Spring Break Week)
Mar. 21  Individual team meetings
Mar. 28  DRAFT OF FINAL REPORT DUE; Individual team meetings
Apr. 4-25 Report revisions/rehearse final presentations as needed/schedule presentations to clients as required
May 2   FINAL WRITTEN CAPSTONE REPORT DUE ***DEADLINE***
May 9   Final reports to clients/preparation for Capstone End Event
        PEER EVALUATIONS AND SELF-EVALUATIONS DUE
May 10  NYU/WAGNER SCHOOL-WIDE CAPSTONE END EVENT, 5:00-6:30 p.m.