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)      Summer/Fall 2010
Summer: May 17, 18, 19, 24, 25, 26; 6-9 p.m.  194 Mercer St. Room 205
Fall: Tuesdays 6:45 p.m.     194 Mercer St. Room 210

Instructors

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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. The summer section of international capstone is intended to create the opportunity for a more extensive fieldwork than is normally possible during the regular academic year. 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 team’s findings to the faculty advisors and the clients, both through a presentation (where 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 prepared to be flexible and adaptable.

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 for a particular project;
   - 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 have been 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 intensively for a two week period in May to prepare for the summer fieldwork. It meets weekly like any other course in the fall semester when teams are writing up their final reports. 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
**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
     - **Project deliverables**, including: draft work plan, fieldwork report, other agreed-on progress reports, revised work plan; draft final report, revised final report.
     - **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 could be following a more accelerated or extended schedule to meet the needs of their specific clients or team preferences, the emphasis during the late spring intensive meetings will be on **facilitation of team start-up and fieldwork preparation**. During the summer the team will **conduct the fieldwork**. The fall 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 **meet as needed (in person or virtually) during the summer** to complete preparations for the fieldwork.

5. Students should also generally **expect to meet weekly in the fall semester** as a team, although there may be some weeks when it is not necessary to meet or when multiple meetings are required. These meetings need not occur during the regular class period or in the classroom if team members collectively agree to meet at another time and place.

**Assignments**

To complete course requirements, students must hand in 6 written assignments: (1) a team charter; (2) a team work plan/agreement; (3) team field research report; (4) mid-course evaluations; (4) 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 Spring 2011 graduation (and for some students Fall 2010 graduation), 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 CHARTER**

**Deadline:** May 21, 2010

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

A team charter is a summary of your project team’s objectives, structure and work practices (see template and samples on Blackboard). It should reflect the input and consensus of all team members and should address how you interact with each other, your client, and your faculty advisor. The purpose of preparing agreements in writing is to make them clear and explicit. 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. All team members must sign the charter before you hand it in.

2) **WORK PLAN**

**Deadline:** May 28, 2010 (Draft); June 23, 2010 (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) **TEAM FIELD RESEARCH REPORT**

**Deadline:** September 7, 2010

**Length** 15-20 pages of text; attachments as needed

Each team must write up preliminary results and questions emanating from their field research 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 fall semester and will help to clarify the content and format of the final report.

4) **MID-YEAR COURSE/PEER/SELF EVALUATIONS**

**Deadline** September 7, 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.
(5) **Final Team Report**

**Deadline**  
October 26, 2010 (Draft); December 7, 2010 (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 September 2010; (2) a first draft of the final report due no later than October 26, 2010 (to allow adequate time for faculty and client comments); (3) the final report due on December 7, 2010. Only the final report will be formally graded. Class sessions in November may be used as rehearsals for the final professional presentations when needed. NOTE: Since most team members will not graduate until May 2011, it may be possible for some teams to complete the final report in Spring 2011, but the goal is for all teams to have finished by the end of the Fall 2010 semester, and this is the expectation of the clients when they agree to sponsor a summer-fall capstone.

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

**Deadline**  
December 14, 2010

**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 on line 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.
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 for some reason require somewhat earlier or later deadlines.

CAPITAL LETTERS INDICATE MAJOR ASSIGNMENT OR CAPSTONE MILESTONE

SUMMER 2010 SCHEDULE

May 17 Introduction of capstone course, projects and participants
Getting started: organizational and task diagnosis/negotiating with clients/initial contact with clients

May 18 Initial team meetings; work on preparation of team charters

May 19 Team Building Session (with Professor Joe Magee);
TEAM CHARTER DUE MAY 21

May 24- May 26 Individual team meetings
Initial meetings or video/teleconferences with clients
Work plan preparation
DRAFT WORK PLAN DUE MAY 28

June Work plan and fieldwork preparation continues
FINAL WORK-PLAN DUE (APPROVED BY FACULTY ADVISOR AND CLIENTS) DUE JUNE 23

July-August Fieldwork (mostly in July but into early August for some teams)
Work on preparation of initial report on fieldwork results

FALL 2010 SCHEDULE

Sept. 7 Progress reports/problem-solving sessions
TEAM FIELD RESEARCH REPORTS AND MID-YEAR EVALUATIONS DUE

Oct. 19 Individual team meetings
Report drafting

Oct. 26 Individual team meetings
DRAFT OF FINAL REPORT DUE

Nov. 2- Nov. 30 Individual team meetings
Report revisions
Schedule presentations to clients (where applicable)

Dec. 7 Last day of class
FINAL WRITTEN CAPSTONE REPORT DUE ***DEADLINE***

Dec. 14 FINAL EVALUATIONS DUE

SPRING 2011 SCHEDULE

May TBA NYU/WAGNER SCHOOL-WIDE CAPSTONE EXPOSITION, 5:00-6:30 p.m.