NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE

CAPSTONE: ADVANCED PROJECTS IN
PUBLIC AND NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT

Note: This syllabus is subject to change!

CAP-GP 3116 (003)
Fall 2012 & Spring 2013

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COURSE SUMMARY

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.

PROJECTS

I have identified an array of potential projects. Potential clients will present their projects to you in the first couple of weeks in class. I will ask you for your preferences, but – just to be very clear – I will create the teams based not only on your preferences, but on your previous coursework, work and life experience, other expertise, and team size. I will also strive to create teams diverse in age, degree of work experience, race and ethnicity, gender and other dimensions of difference. Teams are comprised of 3-5 students.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The class will involve presentations from the instructor and guest speakers, class discussion and team meetings. Course requirements include:
- enrollment in both semesters;
- attendance and participation in class activities and team meetings;
- completion of assignments on time;
- participation in field work;
- participation in meetings with clients;
- participation in preparation and presentation of findings.

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.

60% of the final 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. 40% of the final 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. **Even though students will be working in teams, students will receive individual grades. This means that students on the same team can receive different grades.**

**COURSE MILESTONES**
The course has a series of milestones – both activities and products -- that will serve as interim work products. I’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:

- “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);
- 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 (October/November);
- Final, signed client-team work agreement and detailed team workplan (November);
- Team charter (November);
- End-of-first semester self, team/peer, and course evaluations; discussion of team process and progress (December);
- First draft of final project report to faculty (February);
- Second draft of final project report to faculty (March);
- 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-course self, team/peer, client and course evaluations (end April);
- Presentation for end event (May).

**REQUIRED TEXTS**
A. Block, Peter. 2000. *Flawless Consulting, 3rd edition.* Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer. NOTE: The book is available at the NYU bookstore, but you may be able to get the book more cheaply on Amazon or on Block’s website [www.designedlearning.com](http://www.designedlearning.com). There should be a link on the left side of the home page or you can click on Publications. **ANOTHER NOTE:** The 3rd edition does have some changes from the 2nd edition, so you should get the 3rd edition.

B. 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 10
Overview and introductions: Get to know each other a little. Review the syllabus and clarify course structure and expectations. Begin client presentations about their projects.

WEEK 2: September 17 [This is Rosh Hashanah. NO CLASS.]

WEEK 3: September 24
Continue with client presentations and misc course logistics.

➢ Assignments for Week 4 on October 1
  ▪ Team selection: Fill out Student Information and Preference Form and attach your resume. Please make this ONE DOCUMENT and post this on Blackboard by midnight on Thursday September 27.
  ▪ Teams will be posted on Blackboard by the end of Saturday, September 29.
  ▪ Reading for class discussion:
    ▪ Flawless Consulting (read in this order): Chapter 19, and then chapters 1, 2 and 3.

WEEK 4: October 1
You will come to class knowing your project teams. Discussion about: What is consulting? What will your role be? How might your individual backgrounds influence your consulting work?

➢ Assignments for Week 5 on October 8
  ▪ Team Assignments
    ▪ Schedule one get-together that is purely about getting to know each other. See handout for sample questions and topics to address.
    ▪ Schedule and conduct initial client meeting during the period from October 9-18. I must be present at the meeting (I will give you my availability).
    ▪ Bring in background information on your client for team and class discussion.
Individual Assignment: Read Flawless Consulting, chapters 4 and 5

WEEK 5: October 8
Prepare 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?

- Assignment for October 15 [though we will not have class you still are responsible for this assignment]:
  - 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 on October 22.

[October 15--Fall break. NO CLASS.]
- Assignment for Week 6 on October 22:
  - 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.
  - Flawless Consulting, chapter 10

WEEK 6: October 22
We will discuss ethics-related issues in Capstone and the elements of a successful client-team work agreement and an (internal) workplan. We will hear from all teams about their first client meetings.

- Assignments for Week 7 on October 29:
  - 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 28.
  - Schedule meeting with client to present and negotiate work agreement during the period from November 7 to November 15. I must attend these meetings (I will give you my availability).

WEEK 7: October 29
If necessary, continue discussion of work agreements and workplans. Team meetings with professor to review assignments. Teams will work on their client-team work agreement and internal workplan.

- Assignment for Week 8 on November 5:
  - 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 4.

WEEK 8: November 5
Each team presents their draft work agreement as rehearsal for presentation to and negotiation with the client. Team meetings to incorporate feedback into plan.

- **Assignment for Week 9 on November 12:**

**WEEK 9: November 12**

Those teams that have met with clients present the results of the meeting. Discussion of team dynamics, including working in diverse teams. 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 19:**
  - Final written work agreement agreed with client. This should be signed by the client and team.
  - Final workplan due 5pm Sunday, November 18

**WEEK 10: November 19**

Those teams that have met with clients present the results of the meeting. Continue work on team charters.

- **Assignments for Week 11 on November 26:**
  - Team charter due.
  - Flawless Consulting, chapter 13

**WEEK 11: November 26**

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: December 3**

If needed, more info on data gathering methods. Team meetings.

- **Individual Assignment for Week 12 on December 10:**
  - End-of-semester written self-assessment, peer review of team members and feedback for me on the course.

**WEEK 13: December 10**

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.

**WEEK 14: December 12** [This is a Legislative Day. Classes will meet on a Monday schedule]
Hold for class meeting; we will decide if it is necessary.

CLASS SCHEDULE: SECOND SEMESTER

During this semester, a good portion of the time will be set aside for teams to meet on their own or with me. However, as you can see from the schedule below, we will also be meeting as a group a number of times during the semester. Therefore, you must be available every Monday night during class time. Also, for planning purposes, I’ve posted potential deadlines, but these are preliminary and could change.

Week 1: January 28
Class meeting: Will discuss schedule for the spring semester; also will have cross-learning groups. Team meeting time.

Week 2: February 4
Team meeting time.

➢ Assignment for Week 3 on February 11:
  o Flawless Consulting, chapter 14

Week 3: February 11
Class meeting: Discussion of formats and language for final presentations and final reports. Also, team meeting time.

➢ Assignment for Week 4 on February 25
  o First draft of final report

[February 18 – PRESIDENT’S DAY – NO CLASS.]

Week 4: February 25 – Presentation Skills Workshop [Required]

Week 5: March 4
Class meeting: Discuss first drafts of final reports. Also, team meeting time.

➢ Assignments for Week 7 on March 25
  o Second draft of final report
  o Draft slides for final presentation

Week 6: March 11
Team meeting time

March 18 – SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS
➢ Assignment for Week 8 on April 1:
  o Flawless Consulting, chapter 15
**Week 7: March 25** -- Because of Passover, instead of holding class, I will schedule individual times to meet with teams to discuss drafts of reports and presentations – which could be during regular class time or another time that week.

**Week 8: April 1**
Class meeting: Discuss managing the client meeting; also team meeting time.
- **Assignment:** Each team should schedule their final presentations to the clients during the period between April 10 and April 22. I should be present (I will give you my availability).

**Week 9: April 8**
Class meeting: Team rehearsals of final presentations

**Week 10: April 15**
Class meeting: Team rehearsals of final presentations

**Week 11: April 22**
Class meeting: Report back on client response to final presentations and necessary changes to final report. Discuss preparation for Capstone End Event.
- **Assignment for Week 12 on April 29:** Final Team and Self Evaluations: Please get these to me by Sunday, April 28.
- **Assignments for Week 13 on May 6:**
  - Final Project Report

**Week 12: April 29 – Team meeting time**

**Week 13: May 6 – Team meeting time**

**Week 14: May 13**
Take a step back and reflect on the year’s work. Celebration!

**Capstone Expo: May 14, 5:00-6:30.**