Course Objectives

This is one of the Wagner School’s capstone courses. Its defining features are that students work on a project with a “real world” client, that the project requires integrating and applying knowledge acquired in multiple courses, and that students work as a team to complete the project.

As a capstone for students with a specialization in policy analysis, the course involves projects that require program evaluations or prospective policy analysis. Typically, student teams are asked to develop and assess options that clients may use to address important problems facing their organizations. The project is an opportunity for students to apply concepts and skills taught in other Wagner School courses.

Reference Materials

There are no required texts for this course. However, listed below are useful reference materials of two types. The first provide a guide to the type of analysis that typically is required for policy oriented projects; the second are guides to the process of working in teams and making presentations.

Overviews of Analytic Frameworks

Working in Teams and as Consultants


**Course Elements and Timetable**

Students will work in teams on a project that is expected to require the entire academic year for completion. The course can be divided into the following components:

*Project Identification and Team Assignments* – up to 4 weeks
*Workplan Development* – 4-5 weeks
*Workplan Implementation* – 4-5 months
*Final Report Drafting and Revisions* – 4-8 weeks
*Prepare and Deliver Client Final Briefing* – 2 weeks

Each of the components is described more fully below.

**Project Identification and Team Assignments**

September 10 – Introduction and overview of the course
September 17 – Religious holiday, no class
September 24 - Representatives of organizations with projects they would like undertaken will present their proposals to the class
October 1 – Team assignments and initial team meetings; discussion of ground rules for team work and the development of a team charter.

**Workplan Development**

After selecting projects, each team will meet with their client and develop a workplan for the project. The workplan is a written document that identifies the specific tasks to be completed, estimates the time required for each task and the expected completion date, and the team member(s) assigned to each task. The workplan must be approved by both the client and the faculty member working with the team.
During the period when teams are developing their workplan, there will be two sessions with the entire class. In addition, the instructor will schedule meetings with the individual teams. (Note that October 15 is a University holiday.)

October 8 - Review of a model workplan. Discussion of essential elements of a good work plan.

November 5 – Each team presents its workplan in class. Discussion of lessons learned from the task of preparing a workplan.

Workplan Implementation – November 2012 to March 2013

During this period, the teams will work with the clients to complete the tasks in the workplan. The instructor will schedule periodic meetings with each team to assess progress and provide advice. The timing of these meetings will be linked to the scheduled dates for completion of interim work products and other milestones identified in the workplan.

In addition, the class will meet as a whole approximately once per month during this period. These sessions will deal with common problems and tasks.

Preparation of Final Reports and Presentation - March and April 2013

The outcome of the capstone project is a final report to the client and a briefing for the client based on that report. The written report should be submitted to the client in advance of the briefing, so the client can review it before the oral briefing.

The procedure for submitting a written report to the client requires these steps:

1. Submission of a draft of the report to the instructor
2. Meeting with the faculty member to receive comments and suggestions for revisions
3. Preparation of a revised report and submission to the faculty member for approval
4. Approval from the faculty member to submit the report to the client.

Note that steps 1-3 typically are repeated two or more times before faculty approval is given. This is not necessarily a sign of a weak report; professional work typically is revised several times before final submission. You should anticipate the need for revising your final report and allow sufficient time for this process.

The briefing for the client should be scheduled after the faculty member has approved the final report. The timing should allow sufficient lead time for the client to review the report before the briefing. Class sessions will be scheduled for “dry run” presentations of the briefing by each team. These sessions will be an opportunity for practice and for peer and faculty suggestions for improvement of the presentation.

Note – Each team must make its final presentation to the client no later than May 3, 2013. A final written report must be approved by the faculty supervisor and submitted to the client no later than April 26, 2013. These are absolute final
deadlines; teams are encouraged to submit reports and make presentations before the final deadline.

In order for the final report to be approved by the faculty supervisor by April 26, 2013, a complete first draft should be submitted to the faculty supervisor for comments no later than March 25, 2013. Remember that more than one round of revisions to the draft is likely to be necessary to have an approved report.

Capstone End Event

The Wagner School sponsors a capstone end event in which all capstone teams are expected to participate. You will be asked to prepare a poster board summarizing the team project. The end event is usually scheduled for late afternoon/early evening on a weekday during the first week in May. You will be advised of the exact date well in advance.

Course Requirements and Grading

In order to receive a passing grade, students must meet these minimum requirements:
1. Attend scheduled class sessions.
2. Participate actively in team meetings.
3. Complete specific tasks assigned by the team and identified in the team workplan.
4. Work with other team members to produce a written report and to make an oral presentation to the client.

Within the range of passing grades (A to C), differential assessment will be made primarily on the quality of the written final report and briefing. Grades are the responsibility of the faculty, but I will consult the clients regarding their judgment of the quality of the written product and the team’s overall work.

All other things being equal, each team member will receive the same grade based on the faculty evaluation of the team’s written product. However, in circumstances where there is clear evidence of uneven contributions among team members, adjustments may be made to individual team member’s grades. Since such situations typically are identifiable in advance of submission of the final report, individuals who may be graded differently than the rest of the team typically will be so advised in advance. Written interim peer evaluations will be required by the faculty near the middle of the academic year, and another written peer evaluation will be sought near the end of the team’s work. These peer evaluations (as well as the faculty members’ independent observation and judgment) will provide a basis for assigning any differential grades among team members.
Timeliness and meeting deadlines are important aspects of professional behavior. Accordingly, late projects will be penalized in terms of grading. Teams who do not submit a draft report by March 25, 2013, or do not have an approved final report by April 26, 2013, will have the grade based on the quality of their report lowered by one full letter grade (for example, from A- to B-) due to lateness.