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.

This Capstone course is a specialized research-focused version of this core course. We will focus on key policy interventions to link international migration and skill development. Within the context of this broader research question, students will learn to design the research approach, conduct the data collection and analysis, and present findings, both orally and in writing, to organizations interested in the research project. In contrast to other capstone classes where students are divided into teams, this is a research project that the entire class will tackle. We may divide up the research and fieldwork as we deem appropriate given the research challenges, but this will be done in way that is both more collaborative and more fluid than the standard model.

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.

RESEARCH PROJECT

For all but the most highly-skilled migrants, the process of migration undercuts the value of the skills they bring with them to receiving countries. Most end up working at jobs that underuse their skills and pay them accordingly, or at jobs where their skilled are used but not fully remunerated. This phenomenon – often termed “brain waste” – represents a significant loss of human capital to the economies in which migrants work; moreover, it has implications for the economic development of migrants’ countries of origin, which experience this dynamic through
lower remittances, weaker return transfer of skill and innovation, and higher burdens of consular protections for a workforce that is less able to use its skill as bargaining leverage with employers.

This research capstone will explore policy mechanisms that can prevent this brain waste by making migrants’ skill visible even as they cross borders, and by offering support that enable migrants to translate their skill from one economic context to another. Specifically, this capstone will examine policy tools around the world designed to achieve these goals; we have identified several programs in the Philippines, and in the Australia/Pacific Island region, which will be examined. We will focus on so-called “mid-level” skills in a variety of industries, including nursing and home health care, construction, and various service and hospitality sectors. Initiatives we will analyze transnational certification programs and skills “passports”; training programs in countries of origin tailored to meet the labor market needs of destination countries; and employer-driven recruitment efforts around subsets of skills.

The capstone will tease out the elements of these policy experiments that work, and will identify why they are effective. It will also explore obstacles to the effective implementation of the programs as designed; obstacles considered will include issues ranging from financing, to institutional mismatch, to inadequate definitions of skill requirements. Based on these findings, the capstone teams will suggest useful policy directions and sketch out program designs. In the exploration of future policy directions, the capstone will focus on the regulatory obstacles and supports to creating industry partnership between migrant sending and receiving countries. One possible area of exploration is a system to building a bridge between the health systems of France and Morocco, with the partnership centered on the development and recognition of nursing and other health care skills.

**PROJECT OUTLINE AND DELIVERABLES:**

For this research project on migration and skills, we have a sponsor rather than a client. The World Bank, from its office in the Center for Mediterranean Integration, is funding this research. However, there are several parties that are interested in the results, including the Center for Global Development, the City of New York, the Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Affairs, and others. Michael Clemens, from the Center for Global Development, will be especially involved in supporting this research endeavor.

The deliverables will include:

a. A 60-page report that will include the following:
   a. Lessons from:
      i. training programs in the Philippines for nurses and other health professionals
      ii. certification and training programs for future and returning migrants through the Technical Education and Skill Development Authority in the Philippines
      iii. training programs offered through the AusAID program for future migrants to Australia from the Pacific Islands
b. Recommendations:
   i. general recommendations for the creation of transnational training and certification programs, with a focus on durability, responsiveness, and effectiveness
   ii. specific recommendations on ways to create transnational industry partnerships, possibly between the health systems of France and Morocco, with a focus on the training and skill recognition among Moroccan migrants.

c. A short executive summary (4-5 pages)
d. A related visual/multi-media presentation

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 policy question and its context;
        • frame and refine the problem
        • develop an internal project work plan with timelines and deliverables;
        • develop well supported and realistic recommendations.

     2. Team Management & Collaboration
        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

Unlike most capstones, this research capstone will provide intensive training in the theory and practice of qualitative methodologies. The training will occur in the classroom and in the field. However, this does not mean that students will confine themselves to using qualitative research methods. The methods students adopt to investigate the research question should be motivated by the questions that the data raise.

Several classes will also be devoted to providing students with substantive understandings of the material they will explore through this research project. The course will include several course sessions and numerous readings on migration and skill.

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.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
EVALUATION & GRADING

Students will receive 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.

70% of your final grade is based on interim work products identified and the final project. 30% 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. All readings are required and will be available on Blackboard on through the link indicated.

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:

- Acquisition of basic understanding of qualitative research approaches and a substantive base on the question of migration and skill (September/October);
- Meeting with sponsors (October);
- Research on specific programs to be investigated through fieldwork, and preparation of desk brief (November);
- Preparation of fieldtrip logistics and preparation of interview access,
- End-of-first semester self, team/peer, and course evaluations; discussion of team process and progress; refine individual learning goals (December);
- Back to office report (February);
- Draft of final project report to faculty (March);
- Preparation and completion of possible additional field trip (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-second semester reflection, positioning project in larger issue context (May);
- End-of-course self, team /peer, client and course evaluations (end April/beginning of May);
- Presentation for Capstone Expo (May).
FALL SEMESTER:

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW: September 10
Overview and introductions: Get to know each other a little. Review the syllabus and clarify course structure and expectations.

Field exercise: Experience of New York at Night

Assignment due September 17:
Preparation of description of research motivation and fieldnotes. The description of your research motivation should be about 2 paragraphs long, and field notes should be about 3 pages (single-spaced). A more complete description of this exercise will be offered in class.

WEEK 2: QUALITATIVE METHODS: September 17 (Rosh Hashanah) – possible change in class day

Fieldwork-in-practice: We will consider the experience of conducting fieldwork, through reflection and action exercises.

Review of field exercise
Interview exercise
Discussion of reading

Readings:

WEEK 3: QUALITATIVE METHODS: September 24

Theories of qualitative methods: we will consider various theoretical approaches and justifications of qualitative methodologies.

Please select two of the readings below and be prepared to lead class discussion on them. This involves being able to summarize the article, identify main themes, and prepare discussion questions.

Readings:


WEEK 4: MIGRATION AND SKILL: October 1


WEEK 5: MIGRATION AND SKILL: October 8 (change of class day -- alternate class time will be discussed)

Critiques of perspectives on skill: we will look at critical perspectives on skill – especially questions around what constitutes skill and underlying assumptions around brain drain.

Readings:


WEEK 6: MIGRATION AND SKILL: October 22

We will explore possibilities for transnational certification. We will consider specific models and the assumptions on which they are based. We will also explore areas of weakness and strength.

Readings:

Capstone on Transnational Certification for the Mexican Institute for Mexicans Abroad, 2010 and 2011.

**WEEK 7: MEETING THE SPONSORS: October 29**

We will hold meetings with the sponsors this week. We will also divide up research tasks in preparation for fieldwork. Students will be grouped into research teams.

**Assignment:** In pairs, please summarize the salient findings of the readings on migration and skill thus far, and identify areas of inquiry moving forward. These are subjective and will be different for each pair. These reflection essays should be between 1000 and 1500 words including questions for further exploration. Please turn these in by Sunday **October 28, noon.**

**WEEK 8: RESEARCH ON FIELD CASES: November 5**

Teams will present the finding of their research on the Philippines certification programs, the AusAID program, and will discuss areas of further research on these programs. Students will post any documents found to Blackboard and will generate research summaries of the documents deemed most critical. A research logistics manager will be named.

**WEEK 9: RESEARCH ON FIELD CASES: November 12**

Continuation of research on field cases. Same procedure as above.

**WEEK 10: RESEARCH ON FIELD CASES: November 20**

Continuation of research on field cases. Same procedure as above.

**WEEK 11: RESEARCH ON FIELD CASES AND PROCESS REVIEW: November 26**

Review of work thus far. Students 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: RESEARCH PLAN AND LOGISTICS: December 3**

Preparation of a research design for in-field research
WEEK 13: RESEARCH PLAN AND LOGISTICS: December 10
Refinement of research design and preparation of fieldwork logistics

**Assignment:** Final presentation research plans, one for the Philippines and one for Australia/Pacific Islands. These research plans should be polished and should be ready for presentation to the Capstone sponsors.

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

WEEK 14: RESEARCH LOGISTICS: December 12
Finalizing last minute research/travel plans and assignment of support responsibilities.

JANUARY: FIELDWORK!!!! Dates to be determined.