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

**PADM-GP-4117:**

**Systems Thinking and Information Management in Client-Serving Organizations**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spring 2014 Class Schedule</th>
<th>Spring 2014 Office Hours:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday Jan 30 – Thursday March 13</td>
<td>Class Thursdays</td>
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<td>8:35 – 10:15 pm</td>
<td>7:15 – 8:15 pm</td>
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<td>25 W. 4th St., Room C-13</td>
<td>Puck Building, Room 3045</td>
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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

The management of information in human service, criminal justice and public health interventions is fraught with complexity because of the diverse perspectives of stakeholder groups including clients, front-line workers and supervisors, measurers of performance and evaluators, executive leadership, funding agencies and software developers. This course will prepare students to understand and constructively mediate these challenges. Students will adopt a systems stance to critique different ways of construing the boundaries and nature of the service environment. The course critically examines common techniques including the system development life cycle, process modeling and logic modeling, their limitations and their practical (and unintended) consequences for decision-making about data and information systems; and it explores alternative approaches, including cybernetics, domain modeling and the ecosystems perspective, which can help organizations develop more effective, holistic and evolvable information systems.

Specifically, this course is designed to enable students to:

- Understand differences among various stakeholder groups’ desire for and use of information;
- Understand costs associated with information management capacity and activities;
- Become familiar with the structure of software, the stages of and roles within projects to develop or customize it, and factors that contribute to success or failure;
- Understand the particular complex of problems that client-serving agencies face around competing internal priorities, reporting to external funders, acquiring information systems, integrating data across multiple programs, and managing change;
- Learn how emerging trends in shared measurement and data integration may affect agencies;
- Become familiar with elements of the systems thinking traditions which are helpful for planning information management activities in client-serving organizations.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Grading will be based on the following:

- **Comment on Reading** (10%). A two or three paragraph response to a question about a reading.
- **Midterm Exam** (30%). Take-home exam with open use of readings. Three questions (two or three paragraph response each) on concepts and situations discussed in readings and classes.
- **Individual Class Participation** (10%). Active participation in class discussion.
- **Group Case Study & Presentation** (50%). A study analyzing the information management situation and challenges of a real-life client-serving program.

CALENDAR:

| Thursday 1/30 | Session 1 – First Glance at the Landscape | [Comment on Reading – Assignment Distributed] |
| Thursday 2/6  | Session 2 – Analytical Stakeholders & Information System Roles | [Comment on Reading – DUE] |
| Thursday 2/13 | Session 3 – Mechanical Notions & Beyond |
| Thursday 2/20 | Session 4 – Disciplines of Organizing Information | [Take-home Exam – Distributed] |
| Thursday 2/27 | Session 5 – Widening the Lens | [Take-home Exam – DUE] |
| Thursday 3/6  | Session 6 – Dynamism & Self-Reflection |
| Thursday 3/13 | Session 7 – Synthesis | [Group Projects DUE and Presentations Given] |
SESSION DETAILS & READINGS:

SESSION 1: FIRST GLANCE AT THE LANDSCAPE

- Introductions. Course goals and expectations.
- Kickoff of Group Project
- Information Management and Client Service Perspectives
- Tour of a Portfolio’s Strategy
- The Systems Thinking Tradition – Key Concepts

Readings:
- D. Dreher (2007), ‘Client Data Management: Collecting, Storing & Using Data’ Center for Victims of Torture

SESSION 2: ANALYTICAL STAKEHOLDERS AND INFORMATION SYSTEM ROLES

- Information Management and Performance Measurement Perspectives
- Case Study Discussion: Our Piece of the Pie
- The Information Systems Context of Human Service Organizations
- The Development of Information Systems – Key Concepts & Practical Realities

Readings:
- J. Rakos (1990), Software Project Management for Small to Medium Sized Projects, pp. TBA
### SESSION 3: MECHANICAL NOTIONS & BEYOND

- Flowcharts and Process Modeling
- The Structure of Software
- Case Study Discussion: A Software Development Disaster
- Logic Modeling as a Systems Approach

Readings:
- NPower, ‘Using flowcharts to map a service delivery process’ (n.d)
- Other readings to be announced.

### SESSION 4: DISCIPLINES OF ORGANIZING INFORMATION

- Database Design and Data Modeling
- The Role of Taxonomies and Definitions
- Group Exercise With Center for Torture Victims Data Model
- Systems, Meaning and Domain Modeling

Readings:
- Center for Victims of Torture (1997), ‘Data Model for Torture Treatment Centers’
- M. Mattaini & C. Meyer ‘The Ecosystems Perspective: Implications for Practice’
- Other readings to be announced.

### SESSION 5: WIDENING THE LENS

- Tragedies of the Data Commons
- Measurement Across Portfolios and the Notion of Common Measures
- Case Study Discussion: New York State’s Cross-Agency Juvenile Justice Indicators
- Service integration and the National Information Exchange Model

Readings:
- B. Blumenthal (2010) ‘Is your agency (or grantee) starved for data?’, *Community Resource Exchange Blog*
- M. Kramer, M. Parkhurst & L. Vaidyanathan (2009), *Breakthroughs in Shared Measurement and Social Impact*, FSG
- Other readings to be announced.
SESSION 6: DYNAMISM & SELF-REFLECTION

- Cybernetics – Background and Key Concepts
- Viable Systems Theory
- Case Study Discussion: Cybernetics in a Homeless Shelter
- Soft Systems Approaches

Readings:
- Other readings to be announced.

SESSION 7: SYNTHESIS

- Information Management: Predicaments and Possibilities for Client-Serving Organizations

Readings:
- To be announced.