NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE
CAPSTONE: CAP-GP 3149 APPLIED RESEARCH IN ECONOMICS, SECTION 001
AS OF 9/3/2014
SUBJECT TO CHANGE
194 MERCER, ROOM 305

INSTRUCTORS
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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 contributes to our knowledge base about public policy issues. Over the course of the academic year, students work in teams to answer a question of public policy importance. Students will develop a research question, identify data to answer the question, collect and analyze data, and summarize and present findings, both orally and in writing.

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, 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.

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;
- develop a work agreement within the team to successfully complete 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;
- 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 if appropriate, 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, 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

During the first few weeks we will work as a class to form research teams and to begin to develop and refine research questions that the groups will be addressing over the course of the year. If necessary, we will assist in team formation, but ideally teams will form naturally based on common areas of interest. Teams are comprised of no less than 4 students and no more than 5 students.

The class will involve presentations from the instructor, possible 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, if necessary;
- participation in preparation and presentation of findings.
EVALUATION and 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” (Incomplete Pass) to reflect the “work in progress” nature of the year long project. We will assign final grades at the end of the second semester.

Grades will be allotted to individuals, not to the team as a whole. That is, team members may receive different grades if we feel that is warranted. Students will be graded on both the final research products and evidence of progressive learning throughout the course, based on the Learning Objectives. Sixty percent of the final grade is based on work products identified in the milestones as well as any interim deliverables assigned by the faculty member while the remaining 40 percent 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 team meetings; and end-of-semester faculty, peer and self evaluations. Remember that your team members will be responsible for assigning part of your grade, so please treat them with the respect and courtesy that you would treat your professors!

REQUIRED TEXTS

There is no required textbook for this course, but we will be adding readings to the course website as the semester progresses.

COURSE MILESTONES

The course has a series of milestones -- both activities and products -- that will serve as interim work products. We have suggested time frames in parentheses, though actual timing during the course of the year may vary depending on the specific situation of the research project and all are subject to change.

These milestones include:

- Individual learning goals and team formation (September/October);
- Obtaining data source to answer research question (October);
- Clear statement of the research problem (October);
- Meeting(s) with team to negotiate work plan (October/November);
- Final, signed 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; refine individual learning goals (December);
- First draft of final project report to faculty (December);
- Final report (April);
- Oral presentation of final report to class/faculty (April);
- End-of-course self, team /peer, and course evaluations (end April/beginning of May);
- Final class presentation for Capstone Expo (May).
CLASS SCHEDULE: FIRST SEMESTER

You should be available to meet in class on every Monday night throughout the term with faculty or just with your team members. However, we will not have dedicated classes every Monday night.

Twice during the year we require all students to attend a Capstone skills training instead of going to class. These dates are:
- October 27, 2014: Capstone Advanced Team Session at Kimmel Student Center, 60 Washington Square South.
- February 23, 2015: Presentation Skills training. Location TBA. We also have copies of the trainer’s powerpoint slides.

Also, Capstone Expo will be on Tuesday, May 12, 2015.

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.

CLASS SCHEDULE: SECOND SEMESTER

During this semester, much of the time will be set aside for teams to meet on their own or with faculty members (as needed). The main emphasis is on time spent working with teams and final products, and we can be flexible about the need for formal class meeting times as the semester progresses. However, as needed, we will schedule problem-solving or skill-building sessions, so you must be available every Monday night during class time. Also, for planning purposes, we have posted some potential deadlines, but these are preliminary and could change.

RESEARCH RESOURCES

NYU’s Bobst Library has a Data Services Librarian for Public Administration and Government Information who is available to assist Wagner students in gathering background information on public administration, public policy, and urban planning. Contact her directly at: samantha.guss@nyu.edu

Students who need help with data management (reformatting files, changing files from one software package to another), data analysis (SPSS, SAS, Stata), and GIS mapping should contact or visit the new NYU Data Service Studio located on the 6th floor of the Bobst Library. This ITS/Libraries service conveniently locates, staff, software, statistical computing, and data collection resources to support quantitative research at NYU. Consultation is available via email (data.service@nyu.edu), telephone (212-998-3434), by appointment, or on a walk-in basis. Information on workshops and other events is available by subscribing to the ITS/FTS Statistics and GIS Group Listserv at: Statistics@forums.nyu.edu. Studio hours are listed on the library’s hours and access page http://www.library.nyu.edu/about/access.html.