NYU | WAGNER

Capstone: Applied Research in Policy and Politics
CAP-GP 3148/9, 2015-16

Syllabus

Mondays 6:45-8:25pm
WAVE Room 669

Professor
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COURSE SUMMARY

Capstone is learning in action. In architecture, the capstone is the crowning piece of an arch, the center stone that holds the arch together, giving it shape and strength. Part of Wagner's core curriculum, the 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.

For those of you who have chosen the Applied Research track, the course will synthesize your skills in policy analysis and empirical methods in an integrative project that answers an important policy question. Over the year, you will work in teams to develop a research question, identify and analyze existing data to test your arguments, and present your findings in both oral and written form. The course has dual objectives. One is to sharpen your skills as a rigorous consumer and producer of policy knowledge. The other is to learn how to work effectively and efficiently in a team environment, in which most policy research is conducted.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Capstone integrates and enhances learning in several arenas: a content or issue area, process skills including a project, team management, and research methods for gathering, analyzing and reporting data. The specific learning objectives are:

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.

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:
- frame and refine the research question;
- develop a research work plan with timelines and deliverables;
- monitor their progress against the work plan;
- revise the work plan as necessary.

2. *Team Management*

Students should demonstrate the ability to:
- understand group formation and development;
- understand the importance of interpersonal dynamics and team norms;
- 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.

RESEARCH

Students should demonstrate the ability to:
- identify appropriate quantitative and/or qualitative data analysis methods for their particular project;
- 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

The full class will not meet every week, but you should always have the Monday 6:45-8:25pm slot open for meetings with me or your teams.

The following list of deliverables will help you and your team pace progress and hold each other accountable. The written portion of each task is always due to me *by 5pm on the Friday BEFORE the oral presentation*. Oral presentations should use PowerPoint or a similar program.

Fall Semester Deliverables

Project Idea
A short team presentation (5-10 minutes) that covers the following:
- Your area of interest
- 2-4 researchable and policy-relevant questions that you may tackle
  Research questions typically take the form of "Does X influence Y and why?"
- Possible data sources for each question
- Weaknesses/potential challenges you expect

A short memo (1-2 pages) summarizing above points, written as a team.

Project Prospectus
A full presentation (20-30 minutes) as a team that covers the following:
- Your chosen research question
- Context: How your question fits into the broader policy debate/history in your area
- Research design: How will you test your hypothesis? What cases are you focusing on? What methodologies (cross-sectional analysis, panel, regression discontinuity, matching, diff-in-diff) do you plan to use to demonstrate causality?
- Data/measures:
  o What data set will you use? Describe its nature and why it is a good fit for your project.
  o How are you going to operationalize your independent/dependent variables?
- Analysis plan: Walk us through the analytical steps you will take to test your hypothesis
- Identification of potential weaknesses, either administrative (data or team-related concerns) or analytical (threats to causality or the argument).

A prospectus memo (3-5 pages), written as a team.

Team Charter/Work Plan
Brief outline (2 pages)
- Team Charter portion
  o Identify team members who will take primary responsibility for: literature review, data cleaning and preliminary analysis, detailed analysis, tables and figures, drafting of each section. As a team, you should discuss each of your strengths and skill sets and reach a consensus on the way responsibilities are allocated.
  o Outline specific strategies for communication
  o Outline strategies for conflict resolution
- Work Plan portion: Include a general timeline for task completion.

Progress Report
A presentation (15-20 minutes) on team progress
- Brief recap of your research question/project
- Summarize progress in each area/step
- Initial analysis: This can include an overview of the variables in your data set, some preliminary cross-tabs or bivariate graphs on your hypothesis

- Overview of challenges so far: Anything from team collaboration, analysis, to administrative concerns is valid.

A progress memo (3-5 pages) of the initial results.

Spring Semester Deliverables

Interim Report
A presentation (15-20 minutes) on the project's progress
- Project context, question, conceptual framework, research design, data, and methods: You should treat this as practice for the Final Report presentation
- Presentation of intermediate results in tables and graphs
- Robustness checks for results or plans

Interim Report (5-10 pages). This should be written in a way that can serve as the bare bones outline for the Final Report, with literature review, bibliography, and main results.

Final Report
A professional presentation (20-30 minutes) of the Final Report
- Treat this as practice for your participation in the Capstone Expo

Final Report Due.

EVALUATION and GRADING

Students will receive 1.5 credits for the fall semester and 1.5 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. I 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. I will make this judgment based both on my assessment of students' contribution and learning and on the assessments *you give each other* as part of the evaluation process at the end of the first and second semesters.

Grade Breakdown:

- 60% Works products/Interim deliverables
  - Quality and rigor of presentations and written memos/reports
  - Late submissions will be deducted

- 40% Evidence of learning as outlined in the Learning Objectives
  - Quality of student's participation in the team, based on end of semester faculty, peer, and self evaluations
  - Ability to constructively act on peer/faculty feedback

<div align="center">**COURSE SCHEDULE**</div>

Twice in the year, during regular course hours, we require all students to attend a Capstone skills training session instead of class. These dates are:

1) October 26, 2015: Capstone Advanced Team Session
   Kimmel Center for Student Life, Room TBA
2) February 29, 2016: Presentation Skills Training
   Kimmel Center for Student Life, Eisner & Lubin Auditorium (4th flr)

Capstone Expo will be on May 10th, 5-6:30pm.

Fall Semester

September 14 Overview of course and introductions. Interest/skills questionnaire.

September 21 Team Formation. Discussion of what makes a good research project.
Required Reading: "What is Research Design?"
Evan Lieberman. "Ethnic Politics, Risk, and Policy-Making: A Cross-national Statistical Analysis of Government Responses to HIV/AIDS." *Comparative Political Studies* 40(12): 1407-1432.

September 28 Practical steps for applied research I
Lecture notes will be posted before weekend; please print and bring for notes.

October 5 Practical steps for applied research II
Lecture notes will be posted before weekend; please print and bring for notes.

October 13
(Tuesday) **Project Idea Presentations**

October 19 Workshop: Feedback, finalize research question

October 26 Mandatory Capstone Advanced Team Session

November 2 **Project Prospectus Presentations**

November 9 Workshop: Discuss Team Charter/Work Plan and Prospectus feedback

November 16 No class

November 23 No class

November 30 Workshop: Discuss ongoing issues, preparation for Progress Report

December 7 **Progress Report Presentation.** End of semester evaluations.

December 14 No class

Spring Semester

January 25   Workshop: Discuss evaluations, feedback on progress

February 1   No class

February 8   No class

February 15   No class, President's Day University Holiday

February 22   Workshop: Preparation for Interim Report Presentation

February 29   Mandatory Capstone Presentation Skills Training

March 7   **Interim Report Presentations**

March 14   Spring Recess

March 21   No class

March 28   No class

April 4   Workshop: On a "if needed" basis, feedback on progress

April 11   No class

April 18   No class

April 25   Workshop: Preparation for Final Report presentation

May 2   **Final Report Presentations,** End of semester evaluations

May 10 (Tuesday)   **Capstone Expo**

RESOURCES

Wagner has a new research librarian, Andrew Battista, who can support you in research methods, literature reviews, and data visualization. His main office is at Bobst, but he will also hold office hours at Wagner every other Thursday, 4:30-6:30pm, at the Puck Building, Office 3045 on the third floor.

Students who need help with data management, data analysis (Stata, SPSS, R), or GIS mapping should contact the NYU Data Service Studio located on the 6th floor of the Bobst Library. Consultation is available via email (data.service@nyu.edu), phone (212-998-3434), or on a walk-in basis. Also see the following website (http://guides.nyu.edu/wagner) that Andrew put together for a list of resources and materials that will be helpful to you.