NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE

CAPSTONE: ADVANCED PROJECTS IN FINANCE, POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

Note: This syllabus may be revised.

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BOBST LL138

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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 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. Students will design the approach, conduct the data collection and analysis, and present findings, both orally and in writing, to the client.

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, client and team management, and research methods for gathering, analyzing and reporting data. The specific learning objectives are:

A. <u>CONTENT</u>

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. **<u>PROCESS</u>**

- 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. <u>Project Management</u>

  Students should demonstrate the ability to:
  - assess the client organization and its environment;
  - frame and refine the problem presented by the client;
  - develop a work agreement with the client for 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;
  - develop well supported and realistic recommendations.

  2. <u>Client Management</u>

  Students should demonstrate the ability to:
  - develop and sustain their relationship with the client;
  - negotiate a work agreement with timelines and deliverables;
  - maintain regular and productive contact with the client;
  - solicit and integrate feedback on progress against the contract and modify as necessary;
  - deliver final product to client's satisfaction.

  3. <u>Team Management</u>

  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

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.

PROJECTS

We have identified an array of projects. Potential clients will present their projects to you in the first few weeks in class. We will ask you for your preferences, but – just to be very clear – we will create the teams based on your preferences and on your previous coursework, work and life experience, other expertise, and team size. We will also strive to create teams diverse in age, degree of work experience, race and ethnicity, gender and other dimensions of difference. Teams are comprised of 3-5 students. Each team will be assigned to one of us, depending on the client it is working with.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The class will involve presentations from the instructors and 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;
- participation in meetings with clients;
- participation in preparation and presentation of findings.

EVALUATION and GRADING

Students will be given 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" to reflect the "work in progress" nature of the year long project. We 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.

<u>60% of the final grade is based on work products</u> identified in the milestones as well as any interim deliverables to the client or assigned by the faculty member. <u>40% of the final grade is based on evidence of the individual student's learning</u> 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. <u>**Even though students will be working in teams, students will receive individual grades. This means that students on the same team can receive different grades.**</u>

COURSE MILESTONES

The course has a series of milestones – both activities and products -- that will serve as interim work products. We'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:

- Team creation (October)
- "Entry meeting" with client and faculty (October);
- Preliminary client contract; presentation to class/faculty for feedback prior to client presentation (October/November);
- Meeting/phone calls with client to negotiate contract (October/November);
- Final, signed contract and detailed team workplan (November);
- Team charter (November);
- End-of-first semester self, team/peer, and course evaluations; discussion of team process and progress (December);
- First draft of final project report to faculty (March);
- Second draft of final project report to faculty (April);
- Oral presentation of final report to class/faculty for feedback before presentation to client (April);
- Final report and presentation to client (end April or early May);
- End-of-course self, team /peer, client and course evaluations (end April);
- Capstone Expo (May).

REQUIRED TEXTS

A. Block, Peter. 2011. *Flawless Consulting,3rd[d] edition*. Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer. NOTE: The book is available at the NYU bookstore, but you may be able to get the book more cheaply on Amazon or on Block's website www.designedlearning.com. There should be a link on the left side of the home page or you can click on Publications. ANOTHER NOTE: Make sure you get the 3rd edition.

B. Other readings as assigned.

CLASS SCHEDULE: FIRST SEMESTER

The list of week, topics and assignments that follows is preliminary and subject to change. Teams may end up on slightly different timelines. Students should be available to meet weekly as a class or team unless agreed in class.

September 12
Overview and introductions: Get to know each other a little. Review the syllabus and clarify course structure and expectations. Begin client presentations.

September 19
Continue client presentations. Discuss presented projects.

September 26
Finish client presentations. Discuss all clients/projects.

- Assignments:
    - Team selection: Fill out Student Information and Preference Form and attach your resume and a writing sample. **Please make this ONE DOCUMENT and post this on NYU Classes by Fri. Sept 30**
        - Teams will be posted on NYU Classes by October 5

October 3 ROSH HASHANA – CLASS WILL NOT MEET (but see assignments)

- Team Assignments
    - Schedule one get-together that is purely about getting to know each other. See handout for sample questions and topics to address.
    - Schedule initial client meeting after October 17. Your team advisor must be present at the meeting (we will give our availability).

October 10 FALL BREAK – CLASS WILL NOT MEET

- See team assignments above**.**

October 17
Presentation from one of last year's teams. Preparing for first client meeting.

- **Assignments:**
  - **Team:** Prepare for first client meeting including thinking about agenda for meeting and what roles team members will play; also think about overall scope of project and what you want to suggest.
  - Individual**:** Reading for class discussion on October 31. Flawless Consulting (read in this order): Chapter 19, and then chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

October 24

Attend session on Project Management led by Will Carlin. Rudin Forum at Puck.

- **Assignments**: see week of October 17.

October 31: Follow up on project management. Also, overview of consulting.

- **Assignments:**
  - **Teams** that have met with their client: 2-page memo summarizing the team's findings from their assessment meeting, including a clear statement of the problem to be addressed, thoughts re project elements and any particular challenges you perceive. Be prepared to present to class.
  - **Individual**: (For November 7) DiStefano, J.J. & Maznevski, M.L. 2000. Creating value with diverse teams in global management. Organizational Dynamics 29 (1).

November 7

We will hear from teams about their first client meetings. We will also discuss team dynamics, including working in diverse teams. Begin work on team charters: this will involve reviewing how the team has worked together so far, deciding what elements you wish to retain and then re-designing the elements you want to change. One or more teams may present draft contracts.

- **Assignment: Depending on team:**
  - Teams that have met with their client: 2-page memo summarizing the team's findings from their assessment meeting, including a clear statement of the problem. Be prepared to present to class.
  - Teams that have already done 2-page memo: Prepare as much of first draft of contract as possible, including: statement of the problem, objective of project, information needed, boundaries of the project, final product and interim deliverables.
    - **As part of developing contract, you must also be creating your internal workplan.**
  - Determine process for finalizing and signing contract by mid-November. This could include email exchange of drafts; phone call(s); meeting in person. Your team advisor may need to be involved in phone calls or meetings.

- **Assignments:**
    - **Team:**
        - Draft of team charter due November 6.
    - **Individual:** Read chapters 10 and 13 of Flawless Consulting

November 14
Guest speaker on how to conduct surveys. Presentation of draft contracts.

- **Assignments:**
    - Continue working on contract drafts and workplans.
    - Determine process for finalizing and signing contract by mid-November. This could include email exchange of drafts; phone call; meeting in person. Your team advisor may need to be involved in phone calls or meetings.

November 21
Presentation on how to conduct interviews and focus groups. Presentations of draft contracts. Review mid-course evaluation process.

- **Team assignment:**
    - Final written contract negotiated with agreed with client. This should be signed by the client and team.
    - Final workplan
    - Final team charter
- **Individual assignment**: End-of-semester evaluations: written self-assessment, peer review of team members, and feedback for instructors on the course.

November 28
Depending on progress: discussion of data collection methods, reports from teams on particular issues with clients.

December 5
We will review feedback to us about course. We will meet with each team individually (during or outside class period) to review progress, discuss results of peer evaluations, and highlight any issues for second semester.

December 12
Meet with teams individually (during or outside of class period) to review progress, discuss results of peer evaluations and highlight any issues for second semester.

CLASS SCHEDULE: SECOND SEMESTER

During this semester, a good portion of the time will be set aside for teams to meet on their own or with team advisor. However, as you can see from the schedule below, we will also be meeting as a group a number of times during the semester. Therefore, <u>you must be available every Monday night during class time</u>. Also, for planning purposes, I've posted potential deadlines, <u>but these are preliminary and could change.</u>

January 23
Class meeting: Reports from each team. Discuss schedule for the spring semester.

- **Assignment:**
  - Flawless Consulting, chapter 14
- **Team assignment for February 13**:
  - Review and revise team charter
- **Team Assignment for March 13**
  - First draft of final report
- **Individual assignment for March 20**:
  - Flawless Consulting, chapter 15

January 30
Team meeting time

February 6
Team meeting time.

February 13
Class meeting: Discussion of data analysis and report formatting.
Assignment due: Revised team charter

February 20 PRESIDENTS DAY – NO CLASS

February 27
Class meeting: Team reports

March 6-Presentation Skills Workshop

March 13 – SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS
Assignment due: First draft of reports due

March 20
Class meeting: Discuss first drafts of final reports. Discuss preparation for client presentation. Also, team meeting time.
Assignment due: Flawless Consulting, chapter 15

- **Assignments for April**

- Second draft of final report (early April)
- Each team should schedule its final presentations to the client during the last two weeks of April. Your team advisor should be present.
- Draft slides for client presentations (We need to see these a couple of days before you present to the class.)

March 27
Team meeting time.

April 3, April 10, April 17
Team rehearsals of client presentations**.** Depending on timing, may also include reports on client response to final presentations and necessary changes to final report. Discuss preparation for Capstone Expo.

- **Assignments for May 1:**
  - Final Team, Self and Client Evaluations.
  - Final Project Report

April 24
Team meeting time

May 1 or May 8
Reports from final client presentations. Take a step back and reflect on the year's work. Celebration!

Capstone Expo: May 9 , 5:00-6:30.