

**NEW YORK UNIVERSITY  
ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE  
URBAN PLANNING CAPSTONE SYLLABUS**

CAP-GP 3601 Section 001: Urban Planning Capstone  
Fall 2017 – Spring 2018  
Day & Time: Monday, 6:45-8:25 PM  
Place: Global Center, 238 Thompson St., Room 275  
*Posted: August 2017*

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**COURSE SUMMARY AND OBJECTIVES**

Capstone is learning in action. Part of the core curriculum of the Masters program at the Wagner School, it provides students with both a critical learning experience and an opportunity to perform a public service. It also can provide students with a credential as they seek post-graduation employment. Over the course of an academic year, students work in teams to address challenges, solve problems and identify opportunities for a client organization. Ultimately, Capstone contributes not only to the students' educations, but is a university resource for the public good.

The concept of the Capstone derives from architecture, where 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 integrating and enhancing student learning in several different arenas: a content or issue area, key process skills including project management and teamwork, and methods for gathering, analyzing and reporting data. Capstone requires students to integrate their learning in all these areas, and to do so in real time, in an unpredictable, complex real world environment. Although each student will be assigned to a team, the class will work as a learning community dedicated to the success of all the projects.

Potential projects have been identified and reviewed by the Capstone faculty. Faculty will assign students to project teams based on a number of factors including student preference and expertise as well as team size and the needs of a particular project. Teams are usually comprised of 3-5 students who bring a mix of skills and experience and have expressed an interest in the project.

## 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:

- be capable of positioning and evaluating their project within its broader planning context.
- be familiar with specialized vocabularies required to perform the project successfully;
- be aware of critical research related to their content area.

### 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 are expected to demonstrate the following abilities in the specific process areas:

#### *1. Project Management*

- frame and refine the problem presented by the client;
- develop a work scope with the client for the project;
- develop a project work plan with timelines and deliverables;
- monitor team progress against the scope and work plan;
- revise the work plan, including deliverables, as necessary; and
- develop well-supported and realistic recommendations.

#### *2. Client Management*

- assess the client organization and its environment;
- develop and sustain the team's relationship with the client;
- negotiate a project work plan with the client, including timelines and deliverables
- maintain regular and productive contact with the client;
- solicit and integrate client feedback on progress against work plan as necessary; and
- deliver final product to client's satisfaction.

#### *3. Team Management*

- 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; and
- appreciate and learn from cultural differences.

### C. RESEARCH

The development of research skills is an important part of the course. This research will focus on the subject matter relevant to the students' respective projects. Past project subjects include GIS, Transportation Planning and Analysis, Environmental Planning and Analysis, Housing, Market and Financial Analysis, Site Selection, Community Development and Partnerships, and Economic and Social Impact Analysis. With respect to research skills, students should demonstrate the ability to:

- identify and 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 and literature related to their subject areas;
- identify and implement appropriate quantitative and/or qualitative data gathering and analysis methods for their particular project;
- situate their findings in the broader related literature;
- draw conclusions based on their findings; and
- communicate their work effectively both orally and in writing.

## **SUMMARY OF COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

The class will involve presentations from the instructors and guest speakers, class discussion and team meetings and in some cases attendance at courses or lectures outside of the normal Capstone class schedule where appropriate and feasible. Course requirements at both the team and individual levels include the following:

- 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; and
- completion of all evaluations.

## **CREDITS AND COURSE EVALUATION CRITERIA AND GRADING**

*Credits:* Students will be given two credits for the fall semester and two for the spring semester of Capstone. Note that it is the custom in Capstone to report end of first semester grades as IP to reflect the “work in progress” nature of the year-long project (students should inform the professors if this is a problem).

*Grading Criteria:* Students will be graded on both the products they deliver to their clients and faculty and evidence of progressive learning throughout the course, based on the Learning Objectives (see above), including an ability to incorporate and bring an urban planning perspective to the project.

- **70%** of the grade is based on **team** work products and activities identified in the milestones.
- **30%** is based on evidence of the **individual student’s** learning and performance during the course through active participation in the team’s work (including as indicated by team-member evaluations and the ongoing work log), class activities, meetings with faculty, and his/her ability to act on peer and faculty feedback. Quality of end of semester peer and self evaluations, demonstration of progressive improvement over the course, as well as individual performance on final presentation to the capstone class and client will also be considered for this portion of the grade.