

**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 due to changing team and project circumstances.*

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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**

**A. CONTENT**

Students should demonstrate the ability to:

- understand the policy and/or management context for their project;
- be familiar with relevant specialized vocabularies;
- draw on critical research related to their content area;
- connect their project with previous coursework in their broader program and specialization.

**B. PROCESS**

Overall, students should demonstrate a capacity for flexibility and resilience, as shown by adapting to changing and complex circumstances, balancing competing demands, accepting uncertainty and ambiguity, and knowing when to consult with their Capstone instructor.

**1. Project Management**

Students should demonstrate the ability to:

- frame and refine the problem presented by the client;
- develop a contract with the client including scope, timeline and deliverables;
- develop an internal project workplan;

- meet deadlines and monitor their progress against the contract and workplan;
- revise contract and workplan as necessary.

## 2. Client Management

Students should demonstrate the ability to:

- negotiate a contract with their client;
- develop and sustain a relationship with their client;
- maintain regular and productive communication with the client;
- solicit and integrate feedback from the client on design and deliverables;
- submit deliverables on time.

## 3. Team Management

Students should demonstrate the ability to:

- diagnose and attend to interpersonal dynamics;
- define roles and useful division of labor;
- manage assignments and accountability;
- advocate points of view and negotiate differences of opinion;
- solicit and offer feedback;
- appreciate and learn from cultural and other differences.

## C. RESEARCH

Students should demonstrate the ability to:

- identify and synthesize existing research relevant to the project
- identify and implement appropriate quantitative and/or qualitative data gathering methods;
- identify and implement appropriate data analysis procedures;
- determine findings;
- develop useful recommendations and/or tools and resources based on findings.

## D. COMMUNICATION

Students should demonstrate the ability to:

- synthesize and summarize large amounts of data and information;
- prepare clear and well-argued written deliverables tailored to the client's needs;
- prepare clear and well-argued verbal presentations tailored to the client's needs.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Potential clients will present their projects to you in the first couple of weeks in class. Then I will ask you to fill out an Info and Preference Form in which you will rank the preferences and also provide background on your previous coursework, work experience, various forms of expertise, time availability, etc. My job is to create teams that can successfully complete the project but I will also take your preferences into account. Teams are comprised of 3-5 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;

- participation in meetings with clients;
- participation in preparation and presentation of findings.

## 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 if I feel that is warranted. 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.

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. Seventy percent of the final grade is based on work products identified in the milestones as well as any interim deliverables to the client or assigned by the faculty member. Thirty percent is based on evidence of the individual student’s learning during the course through participation in the team’s work and class activities, their 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.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Block, Peter. 2011. *Flawless Consulting, 3rd 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](http://www.designedlearning.com). There should be a link on the left side of the home page or you can click on Publications. NOTE: Make sure you get the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

There will be other readings assigned occasionally.

## COURSE MILESTONES

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

- Potential client presentations (September/October);
- Team formation (September/October);
- “Entry conference” with client and faculty to explain the process of the course, establish relationship, assess the client organization, and gather data in order to clarify the presenting problem or issue and client’s initial vision of a successful project (September/October);
- Preliminary client-team contract or work agreement; presentation to class/faculty for feedback prior to giving to client (October/November);
- Negotiations with client to finalize contract (October/November);
- Final, signed client-team 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 (early March);
- Second draft of final project report to faculty (late March /April);
- Rehearsal of client presentation before class/faculty for feedback before presentation to client (April);
- Final report and presentation to client (April/May);
- End-of-second semester reflection and celebration (May);
- End-of-course self, team /peer, client and course evaluations (early May);
- Presentation for Capstone Expo (May).

## CLASS SCHEDULE

We will meet weekly as a class or in teams unless agreed beforehand.

The sequence of classes, and due dates for assignments, could change depending in part on your meetings with clients and the substance of your projects. Specific requirements for each class will be posted on NYU Classes and emailed to you with enough lead time to prepare. NYU Classes takes precedence over what is written here.

### FALL SEMESTER

STAGE	DATE	TOPIC(S)	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
Creating teams	9/11	Introductions; Client presentations (Enterprise and English in Action)	Read all five client proposals and prepare questions.
	9/18	Client presentations; Discussion of projects (Chabad, Housing Plus, AchieveMission)	Come with thoughts and questions on pros and cons of the projects. <b>Due Friday 9/22:</b> Student Information and Preference Form. Attach resume and writing sample and make this ONE DOCUMENT. Post on NYU Classes. Teams will be posted by 9/24.
Launch and planning	9/25	Introduction to consulting; Preparation for entry meeting with client	<b>Individual:</b> <u>Flawless Consulting</u> , Preface to new edition, chs 19, 1,2,3, 4 and 5 (read in this order) <b>Team:</b> a) Schedule one get-together purely about getting to know each other. See handout for sample questions and topics (if you wish). b) Schedule initial client meeting after Oct. 2. I must be present (I will provide availability).
	10/2	Team dynamics 1	<b>Individual:</b> Eisenhardt, Kahwajy & Bourgeois. 1997. How management teams can have a good fight. <u>Harvard Business Review</u> . July-August.  <b>Teams</b> are scheduling and preparing for client meeting.
	10/9	NO CLASS. FALL BREAK.	Teams are scheduling and preparing for client meeting.
	10/16	<b>Required</b> session on project mgmt by Will Carlin. Do not come to regular classroom. Join students from other	

		Capstone sections in Eisner & Lubin Auditorium at Kimmel.	
Contract negotiation and skill-building	10/23	Intro to contracts and workplans	Teams that have met with client will present to class on the entry meeting; Teams that have met with client will draft contract; Teams will present contract to class.
	10/30	Team dynamics 2	1) Leadership Compass 2) DiStefano, J.J. & Maznevski, M.L. 2000. Creating value with diverse teams in global management. <u>Organizational Dynamics</u> 29 (1).  Teams that have met with client will present to class on the entry meeting; Teams that have met with client will draft contract; Teams will present contract to class.
	11/6	Data collection: Surveys	<b>Individual:</b> <u>Flawless Consulting</u> , chs 10 and 13; Complete on-line module on literature reviews. <b>Team</b> charter due 11/12.
Begin project work; Continue with skill-building	11/13	Data collection: Interviews and focus groups	<b>Individual:</b> Self, team peer, and course evaluations.  <b>Teams</b> that have met with client will draft contract; Teams will present contract to class. Contracts should be signed by 11/13 if at all possible.
	11/20	Literature reviews (follow-up to on-line module)	
	11/27	Team updates; Cross-team meetings as indicated	
Evaluation and feedback	12/4	Meetings with teams to discuss peer feedback	
	12/11	Meetings with teams to discuss peer feedback	
	12/12	Meetings with teams to discuss peer feedback. (Yes, this is a Tuesday but NYU courses meet on a Monday schedule.)	



## SPRING SEMESTER

During this semester, much of the time will be set aside for teams to meet on their own or with me. We can be flexible about the need for formal class meeting times. 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, I've noted here some potential deadlines, but these are preliminary and could change.

STAGE	DATE	TOPIC(S)	ASSIGNMENTS FOR CLASS
Project work	1/22	Team updates; Discuss spring schedule Data analysis & report formatting	<u>Flawless Consulting</u> , chs 14-15 Team prepare updates for class Review and revise team charter
	1/29		
	2/5		
	2/12		
	2/19	NO CLASS. PRESIDENTS DAY.	
	2/26		
Project work and report writing	3/5	<b>Required</b> session on presentation skills by Will Carlin. Do not come to regular classroom. Join students from other Capstone sections in Tishman Auditorium at the Law School.	Teams schedule final presentation or client. I must be present (and will provide my availability.)
	3/12	NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK.	First draft of report due
	3/19		
	3/26		
Report writing and presentation preparation	4/2	Teams rehearse client presentations; Preparation for Expo	
	4/9		Second draft of report due; Self, team peer and client evaluations
	4/16		
Finish! Evaluation and feedback; Reflection and celebration	4/23		Third draft of report due
	4/30		
	5/7	Last class: Reflect and celebrate.	
	5/8	CAPSTONE EXPO	