# **NYU Wagner logo**

# **CAPSTONE: CAP-GP Section 005**

# **Fall 2024 – Spring 2025**

## Instructor Information

* Alexander Shermansong
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* Office hours by appointment

## Course Information

* Mondays 6.45 - 8.25 PM
* 181 Mercer St (Paulson Center) Room 421

## Course Description

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.

**Course Learning Objectives**

### 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;

### 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.

#### 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.

#### 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.

#### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### **Learning Assessment Table**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Course Learning Objective** | **Corresponding Assignment** |
| Understand the policy and/or management context for their project | Interim and final products |
| Be familiar with relevant specialized vocabularies | Interim and final products |
| Draw on critical research related to their content area | Interim and final products |
| Frame and refine the problem presented by the client | Signed contract with client |
| Develop a contract with the client including scope, timeline and deliverables | Signed contract with client |
| Develop an internal project workplan | Team workplan |
| Meet deadlines and monitor their progress against the contract and workplan | Signed contract and team workplan |
| Advocate points of view and negotiate differences of opinion | Self and team peer evaluations |
| Appreciate and learn from cultural and other differences | Self and team peer evaluations |
| Identify and synthesize existing research relevant to the project | Interim and final products |
| Identify and implement appropriate quantitative and/or qualitative data gathering methods | Interim and final products |
| Identify and implement appropriate data analysis procedures | Interim and final products |
| Determine findings | Interim and final products |
| Develop useful recommendations and/or tools and resources based on findings | Interim and final products |
| Synthesize and summarize large amounts of data and information | Interim and final products |
| Prepare clear and well-argued written deliverables tailored to the client’s needs | Interim and final products |
| Prepare clear and well-argued verbal presentations tailored to the client’s needs | Interim and final presentations |

## Course Requirements

Once you are familiar with the projects, you will fill out a form which gives me your project rankings and other information. I will take your preferences into account along with the needs of the project, students’ previous coursework, work and life experience, student schedules, team size, and the balance of skills among the team. Ultimately, it’s my job to create teams that can do the work for the client. Teams are comprised of 3-5 students.

The class will involve presentations from the instructor, possible guest speakers, class discussion and team meetings. You should expect to work approximately 5-10 hours a week, including class time, team meetings and project work. Course requirements include:

* enrollment in both semesters;
* attendance and participation in class activities and team meetings;
* completion of assignments on time;
* participation in project work;
* participation in meetings with clients;
* participation in preparation and presentation of findings.

Though Capstone classes are in-person, your team and client meetings do not have to be. Teams can work this out with each other and their client. (We do encourage the first and last meetings with the client to be in person if at all possible.)

**Capstone Expenses**

Each capstone team is entitled to reimbursement of up to $500 of Capstone related expenses, such as photocopying, supplies, etc. None of these funds can be spent hiring others to do work that you are expected to do, like writers, editors, graphic designers, etc. The forms and procedures needed to claim reimbursement for these expenses and a detailed explanation of eligible expenses are found in the Capstone Student Guide, available on the Brightspace course website.

### **Evaluation and Grading**

Students will receive 1.5 credits for the fall semester and 1.5 for the spring semester. You will be graded at the end of each semester. The grade at the end of the first semester will reflect your work, participation and learning to date. I will assign final grades at the end of the second semester. Your final grade will override your fall grade (that is, your fall grade will be changed to reflect your final grade.)

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. If the client’s evaluation of your work is available, I will also take that into account.

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. **70% s based on work products** such as interim and final deliverables as well as other assignments. **30% 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 Readings and Other Resources**

Course readings will be available on the Brightspace website for this course.

**Use of Generative AI**

To ensure academic integrity, students must openly disclose any AI-generated material they use and provide proper attribution. This includes in-text citations, quotations, and references. You are responsible for the information you submit based on a generative AI query (for instance, that it does not violate intellectual property laws or contain misinformation or unethical content). Your use of generative AI tools must be properly documented and attributed in order to stay within university policies on academic honesty.

To indicate the use of a generative AI resource, teams should include the following statement in their assignments: "The author(s) acknowledge the utilization of [generative AI tool Name], a language model developed by [generative AI tool Provider], in the preparation of this assignment. The [generative AI tool Name] was employed in the following manner(s) within this assignment [e.g., brainstorming, grammatical correction, specific section of the assignment].

## Course Milestones

The course has a series of milestones – both activities and products -- that guide and track your work over the course of the year. I’ve suggested time frames in parentheses, though actual timing may vary depending on the specific situation of each team and client.

These milestones include:

* Potential client presentations (August/September);
* Team formation (September);
* 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 (October);
* Negotiations with client to finalize contract (October);
* Final, signed client-team contract and detailed team workplan (October/November);
* Team charter (October/November);
* End-of-first semester self, team/peer, and course evaluations; discussion of team process and progress (December);
* January term: Continue project work (January)
* First draft of final project report to faculty (February/March);
* Second draft of final project report to faculty (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 (April/May);
* End-of-course self, team /peer, client and course evaluations (April/May);

## Class Schedule Overview

Students should expect to meet weekly as a class or team unless agreed in class. **The sequence of classes, and due dates for assignments, could change** depending on your meetings with clients and the substance of your projects.

**Note that all interim and final deliverables must come to me first before they go to the client. We may go through several rounds of revision** before I feel the products are ready to be shared with the client.

Specific requirements for each class will be posted on Brightspace and emailed to you with enough lead time to prepare. **Instructions in email or Brightspace take precedence over what is written here**.

## Fall Semester

| **CLASS** | **TOPICS and ASSIGNMENTS** |
| --- | --- |
| 9/9/24 | * Watch video: What is Capstone? * Review syllabus and Student Capstone Guide * Review capstone proposals and come to class prepared with questions * Speed dating to meet classmates * Read capstone proposals and prepare questions for project liaison |
| 9/16/24 | * Client presentations * **Due 9/21**: Student Info and Preference Form. |
| 9/23/24 | * Watch consulting videos: Intro, What Consulting Is and Isn’t and The Role of Technical and Interpersonal Skills * In class: Share contact info, set up group workspace, get to know each other * Send out first client email by 9/27 - Send draft to professor first * **DUE 9/30**: Team charter * **DUE 10/7**: Hold client kickoff -- must include professor |
| 9/30/24 | ALL SECTIONS   * Mini presentations from each team - what is your project? What’s your initial hypothesis of how to deliver value? * Panel of prior students |
| 10/7/24 | **Client engagement**   * Assignment: Background research on your project * In class: Report on client kickoff * In class: Desk research about your client and engagement * In class: Questions about proposal / contract; hypotheses about how to add value * Read Ethics Memo for students   **DUE 10/10**: Draft contract  DUE 10/25: Signed contract |
| 10/15/24  TUESDAY | **Project management 1: Hypotheses**   * Reading: “The PMO Imperative” * In class: Map deliverables, hypotheses, analyses, tasks * **DUE 10/25**: Work plan   Optional Project Management tutorials   * Project Management Foundations (about 3 hours)   + https://www.linkedin.com/learning/project-management-foundations-2016/welcome?u=2131553 * Project Management Simplified (about 1.5 hours)   + https://www.linkedin.com/learning/project-management-simplified/outlining-the-twelve-steps?u=2131553 |
| 10/21/24 | **Team dynamics**   * Reading: “Teamwork on the Fly” * Reading: “8 Ground Rules for Great Meetings” * Watch consulting videos: The Project Management Triangle, Client Expectations Mgmt, Risk Mgmt, Client Mtg Mgmt. * In class: Leadership Compass |
| 10/28/24 | **NYU Librarians to discuss library research, including literature reviews**   * Review [Wagner Capstone Library Guide](https://guides.nyu.edu/wagner/capstone) * Experiment with using Bobst Library databases to identify scholarly articles regarding your topic. Be ready to show results in class. * **DUE 11/22**: Draft lit review * **DUE 12/6**: Client-ready lit review |
| 11/4/24 | **Data collection**   * Discuss data requests, surveys, interviews |
| 11/11/24 | **Analysis**   * In class: 30-second updates * In class: Identify potential recommendations “answers first” |
| 11/18/24 | **Self and peer evaluation**   * Individual checkins with professors |
| 11/25/24 | THANKSGIVING - NO CLASS |
| 12/2/24 | **Feedback**   * Discuss course and peer evaluations |
| 12/9/24 | **ALL SECTIONS**   * Present lit reviews |

**January Term**

While classes don’t meet, this is generally an important time for group work. Students are expected to be available and working during this time (except for the holiday week between Christmas and New Year’s). If members of your team are planning to travel, just make sure to work things out among yourselves.

**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**.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **CLASS** | **TOPICS and ASSIGNMENTS** |
| 1/27/25 | **Looking ahead: Final reports and presentations**   * Review examples of final reports * Be prepared to give team update * Revised work plan and team charter * **DUE 2/14**: Ghost deck for final presentation * **DUE 2/28**: First draft presentation and/or report * **DUE 2/28**: Schedule final client presentation - must include professor * **DUE 3/21**: Full draft presentation and report * **DUE 4/18:** Present to client * **DUE 4/25:** Finalize report and submit to wagner.capstone@nyu.edu |
| 2/3/25 | **ALL SECTIONS**   * Team reports * Small group discussions about challenges |
| 2/10/25 | **NO CLASS** |
| 2/18/25  TUESDAY | **ALL SECTIONS**  Writing guide by Emily Austin |
| 2/24/25 | **TEAM WORKSHOP, NO CLASS** |
| 3/3/25 | **TEAM WORKSHOP, NO CLASS** |
| 3/10/25 | **ALL SECTIONS**  First peek of final presentation: “elevator pitch” on most important findings and what they mean to your project. |
| 3/17/25 | **TEAM WORKSHOP, NO CLASS** |
| 3/24/25 | **SPRING BREAK - NO CLASS** |
| 3/31/25 | **TEAM WORKSHOP, NO CLASS** |
| 4/7/25 | **ALL SECTIONS**  Rehearse presentations |
| 4/14/25 | **ALL SECTIONS**  Rehearse presentations |
| 4/21/25 | **TEAM WORKSHOP, NO CLASS** |
| 4/28/25 | **Evaluation and reflection**  Read and reflect on evaluations |
| 5/5/25 | **ALL SECTIONS - CELEBRATE** |

**Letter Grades**

Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

| **Letter Grade** | **Points** |
| --- | --- |
| **A** | 4.0 points |
| **A-** | 3.7 points |
| **B+** | 3.3 points |
| **B** | 3.0 points |
| **B-** | 2.7 points |
| **C+** | 2.3 points |
| **C** | 2.0 points |
| **C-** | 1.7 points |
| **F** | 0.0 points |

Student grades will be assigned according to the following criteria:

**(A) Excellent**: Exceptional work for a graduate student. Work at this level is unusually thorough, well-reasoned, creative, methodologically sophisticated, and well written. Work is of exceptional, professional quality.

**(A-) Very good**: Very strong work for a graduate student. Work at this level shows signs of creativity, is thorough and well-reasoned, indicates strong understanding of appropriate methodological or analytical approaches, and meets professional standards.

**(B+) Good**: Sound work for a graduate student; well-reasoned and thorough, methodologically sound. This is the graduate student grade that indicates the student has fully accomplished the basic objectives of the course.

**(B) Adequate**: Competent work for a graduate student even though some weaknesses are evident. Demonstrates competency in the key course objectives but shows some indication that understanding of some important issues is less than complete. Methodological or analytical approaches used are adequate but student has not been thorough or has shown other weaknesses or limitations.

**(B-) Borderline**: Weak work for a graduate student; meets the minimal expectations for a graduate student in the course. Understanding of salient issues is somewhat incomplete. Methodological or analytical work performed in the course is minimally adequate. Overall performance, if consistent in graduate courses, would not suffice to sustain graduate status in “good standing.”

**(C/-/+) Deficient**: Inadequate work for a graduate student; does not meet the minimal expectations for a graduate student in the course. Work is inadequately developed or flawed by numerous errors and misunderstanding of important issues. Methodological or analytical work performed is weak and fails to demonstrate knowledge or technical competence expected of graduate students.

**(F) Fail**: Work fails to meet even minimal expectations for course credit for a graduate student. Performance has been consistently weak in methodology and understanding, with serious limits in many areas. Weaknesses or limits are pervasive.Wagner Academic

## Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a vital component of Wagner and NYU. All students enrolled in this class are required to read and abide by [Wagner’s Academic Code](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/policies/code). All Wagner students have already read and signed the [Wagner Academic Oath](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/policies/academic-oath). Plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated and students in this class are expected to report violations to me. If any student in this class is unsure about what is expected of you and how to abide by the academic code, you should consult with me.

## Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at NYU

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please visit the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) website and click on the Reasonable Accommodations and How to Register tab or call or email CSD at (212-998-4980 or [mosescsd@nyu.edu](mailto:mosescsd@nyu.edu)) for information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are strongly advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

## NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays

[NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays](https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/university-calendar-policy-on-religious-holidays.html) states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Please notify me in advance of religious holidays that might coincide with exams to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives.