PPPA 6019(12)
GW MPP Capstone
Spring 2017

Course Instructors

Professor
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Class Meeting

Selected Wednesdays; 6:10-8:00
Smith Hall #120; 801 22nd St, NW
[Room available for group meetings other weeks]

Prerequisites

Prior completion of all MPP core courses, as well as completion of all degree requirements by the end of the current spring or forthcoming summer semester; otherwise, permission of both your advisor and the instructor is required.

Course Description

Congratulations on reaching the final semester of the MPP program at GW's Trachtenberg School. This capstone course is intended to be a highly integrative undertaking that serves in the place of a end-of-program comprehensive exam. The MPP program begins fairly broadly with required courses and then narrows to a more specialized field of concentration. Now, at the conclusion of the program, the capstone project asks students to integrate and synthesize many components of the curriculum by undertaking a major *pro bono* policy analysis project of value to an external client.

Course Workload

This is an intensive course that requires student teams to work efficiently and effectively to complete an ambitious policy analysis project in a semester's time. Students should expect to spend an average of two hours/week in class sessions or meeting with the course instructors, as well as approximately 8-10 hours of additional individual or team work each week beyond those sessions and meetings.

Student Learning Objectives

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- *Scope* research to meet client needs and resolve analytic challenges in the face of ambiguity and competing values;
- *Systematically-review* the academic and policy literature to identify research questions that, when answered, would extend current understanding;
- *Identify, design,* and *apply* appropriate research methods to conduct a rigorous research project that is responsive to client needs;
- *Efficiently-manage* an intense, demanding, and collaborative research process;
- *Integrate* and *apply* knowledge and analytic skills gained in MPP courses;
- *Communicate* complex research findings effectively to both academic and policymaker audiences;
- *Provide* new information, analysis, and insight to help inform the policymaking process (defined very broadly).

Capstone Assignments and Due Dates

%	*Assignment*	*Due*	*Details*
10%	Course participation, preparation, teamwork	ongoing	p. 4
10%	Initial project plan	1/30	p. 4-6
10%	Project proposal for client	2/13	p. 6
10%	Review of all research instruments	2/27	p. 6
30%	Draft of report sections (3X)	3/13 4/3 4/24	p. 7
20%	Final client report	5/8	p. 7-8
10%	TSPPPA presentation	5/8 & 5/10	p. 8-9
NG	Final report and presentation to client	tbd	p. 9

Class Structure and Schedule

Class Sessions. Unlike a regular TSPPPA course, the Capstone class will not meet every week. Instead, it will combine class sessions, group meetings, and team-led work throughout the semester. These are scheduled throughout the semester as follows:

Week	Date	Class Session	Due
	1/9	Team meetings with instructors	One pager on client (bring to meeting)
1	1/23	Class Meeting 1	
2	1/30	Class Meeting 2	Initial project plan to ER & AP
3	2/6	Class Meeting 3	
4	2/13	Class Meeting 4	Draft Project proposal to ER & AP
5	2/20	No class – Presidents Day	Revised project proposal to client
6	2/27		Research instruments to ER & AP
7	3/6	Team meetings with ER & AP	
8	3/13	No class – Spring Break	Draft report sections to ER & AP
9	3/20		
10	3/27	Team meetings with ER & AP	
11	4/3		Draft report sections to ER & AP
12	4/10		
13	4/17	Team meetings with ER & AP	
14	4/24		Draft report sections to ER & AP
15	5/1	Practice Presentations (M)	
16	5/3	Practice Presentations (W)	
17	5/8	TSPPPA Presentations (M)	Final report due to ER & AP
18	5/10	TSPPPA Presentations (W)	
	TBS	Client Presentations	Final report to client

Online Instruction. Within Blackboard you will find a series of short video presentations that provide further instruction on the key steps of the capstone project (i.e. identifying research questions, presenting research findings). These should be viewed by each member of your team at the appropriate point in the semester (based on your project timeline). Students will be held responsible for incorporating the instruction in these videos within their capstone project.

Role of Instructors. The primary work of the class will be design and completion of your client-based project. We will guide you in this process adopting a role that blends that of a supervisor in a work setting and a professor in an academic setting. At a minimum, you should keep us updated on your group's progress and consult with us on any major decisions your group is facing. In addition, all work projects (i.e. sections of the report, research instruments, etc.) must be reviewed by us before sharing it with your client.

Detailed Description of
Capstone Project & Assignments

Course Participation, Preparation, and Teamwork

Assessed throughout semester. A successful capstone hinges on sustained engagement from start to finish. To be specific, we are expecting:

- Attendance at all of the capstone class sessions and both days of final presentations;
- Reliable, effective contributions to the team capstone project;
- Regular communication with course professor and research advisor who should be engaged to review all written material and prepared presentations, as well as when making decisions regarding the scope and design of your project;
- Meeting all team and class deadlines.

Initial Project Plan

Due January 30 (or earlier). Right away, you should begin working on your initial project plan. Your team should develop a project plan that includes four components (each described in more detail below). These four items should be emailed to both ER & AP. In addition, please bring one hard copy of the packet to class on 1/30.

1. One pager on client and their request;
2. Signed client letter of agreement;
3. IRB certifications for all team members; and
4. Annotated bibliography of 8-10 key readings/reports that will guide your project (at least three of these should be drawn from the MPP curriculum and the others from the broader literature).

Description of Client

Provide a one-page overview of your client and project that includes the following information:

- Your client
- The research question/policy problem/issue your client wants you to analyze
- What you know about the larger decision context (i.e. why does your client want you to analyze this question? How w
- Any concerns your group has about the project
- Ethnical issues that you need to consider and incorporate in your project planning

Client Letter of Agreement

Rather than a Statement of Work (SOW) which might imply a legal contractual obligation, the term "Letter of Agreement" (LOA) has a more informal sound but still defines an important joint commitment. Fairly early in the discussions with a client, mention that the research really begins after the instructor has approved and they have signed a short letter of agreement.

For your reference, a model LOA is posted in Blackboard. As you will see, the LOA should exclude entirely intra-GW steps (such as our class presentations). Please get email approval for the final LOA text from your research adviser **before** giving it to the client.

IRB Ethics Training Requirement

Federal regulations now require researchers to undergo ethics training and certification for research projects they undertake. Because the research projects for this course are considered "professional training" and are not ordinarily published, IRB ethics certification is not legally required for these projects. (If publication is pursued later, IRB approval will be required.)

High ethical standards are always an integral part of the Trachtenberg curriculum and these federal requirements certainly will be pertinent to careers as policy analysts. Understanding the principles and basics of these regulations is important.

To ensure familiarity with these regulations, the online CITI Training Program must be completed with a score of 80% or higher. To get started, please follow these steps:

- Register as a new user at www.citiprogram.org
- Be sure to remember your user name and password.
- Institution: George Washington University (ignore others)
- Then answer questions 2 through 4.
- For step 5, Q1, check "no"; Q2, "no" is fine.
- Next page only requires: GW email; Department=Trachtenberg School; and Role=Student researcher–graduate level
- Next page, check only "Human Subjects Research Training"
- Next page, click "no" to go to "CITI Basic Course"
- Next page, check only "Social and Behavioral Sciences"
- Next "no" for HIPS; "no" for GCP, click Finalize Registration
- Click "Social & Behavioral Research" under "George Washington University Courses" to start the ten modules.

Once you complete the CITI program, you will be provided a certification document. Include a copy of this certification (one for each team member) in your initial project plan. Be sure to also keep a copy for your own records.

Annotated Bibliography

Prepare an annotated bibliography of 8-10 key readings that will guide your capstone project. These may be publications like books or journal articles, but may also be policy reports or summaries of governmental statistics. In your annotated bibliography, each source should be referenced (as you would cite it in your final report) and also include a short paragraph explaining its significance to your project.

At least three (but likely more) of these readings should be drawn from a review of the MPP core courses. As discussed in the course description, the capstone's "integrative experience" is an occasion for a fresh look at the array of foundational courses taken for the MPP degree. With that goal in mind, your team should review the following courses to identify the readings, concepts, and tools most relevant to your capstone project.

- PPPA 6011: Introduction to Public Policy (Politics & Policy Analysis)
- PPPA 6002: Research Methods and Applied Statistics
- PPPA 6013: Econometrics I (second statistics course)
- PPPA 6014: Economics in Policy Analysis
- PPPA 6015: Benefit-Cost Analysis and/or PPPA 6016: Program Evaluation and/or PPPA 6005: Budgeting and Public Finance

The additional readings should be identified during your preliminary research on your topic. Look for articles, books, reports that are regularly cited on this topic (or an aspect of the topic). In addition, look for recent literature review articles or reports on your topic, as well as previous research that asked a similar question and may provide a guide to how your team will pursue the question at hand. Finally, make sure to review the publications of your client organization so you know what they have already done/said on the issue you are studying.

Draft Project Proposal for Client

Due February 13 (or earlier): Based on your preliminary research, prepare a short memo addressed to your client and describing the specific research project you are proposing to answer their initial question. Your memo should clearly describe the specific research questions you plan to answer, as well as provide a rationale for why these are the right research questions for this project. In addition, you should describe the specific methodology, research design, and data analysis strategies that you plan to undertake. By February 13th, email this draft memo to ER and AP for feedback. After you incorporate our feedback (which may take a few rounds of revision), email the memo to your client and cc: ER and AP.

Research Instruments for Review

Due February 27 (or earlier): Before beginning ANY data collection, it is essential that you think carefully about how you will be collecting data, coding documents, structuring focus groups etc. We will work with your team to identify the research instruments that need to be developed and to help you structure them to be most effective. You should email the final versions of your research instruments to both ER & AP by February 27th – or earlier if you wish to start data collection earlier.

Draft Report Sections

Due March 13, April 3, and April 24: As soon as you get approval from your client on your project proposal, you can begin writing your final report. In many cases, you will still be determining this content, but write the sections that you can based on your work to date. We will review your work to date at three points during the semester. Please email ER and AP your draft report (in its latest version) March 13th, April 3rd, and April 24th. By the first due date (March 13th), you should be able to turn in a draft report that includes the first three sections outlined below. By the April 24th due date, you should submit a final draft of your entire report (see format information below).

1. PROJECT RATIONALE
    a. Statement of the problem (why important and to whom)
    b. Objectives of the research (general areas of interest & specific client)
    c. Clearly-defined research question

2. BACKGROUND
    a. Summary of topic/policy/program under study (what do we already know?)
    b. Key information informing your project (why do we need to know what you propose to find out?)

3. METHODOLOGY
    a. Discussion of how prior research informed the research plan
    b. Full explanation of how the study was conducted (including how key concepts were operationalized; data collection; the response rates; etc.)

4. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS
    a. Description of data
    b. Analysis of key relationships etc.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION
    a. Interpretation of data presented in previous section
    b. Alignment of findings with recommendations for you client
    c. Acknowledgements of limits of the study's internal/external validity

Final Report

Due May 8th: Each team should prepare a final report suitable for their client. In most cases, the client will not specify a specific format. In those cases, use the format listed below. Otherwise, please speak with your research adviser about any alternative report structure.

The final capstone project report should be no more than 30 single-spaced pages, one-inch margins, and a standard font. Supplementary appendices (e.g., research instruments) do not count toward the page limit. All in-text citations (name, year, page if applicable) and the end references section should use standard APA or Chicago formats. Extra comments suitable as footnotes should be incorporated as footnotes and not endnotes.

1. **Front matter (about 5 pgs.)**
    a. Title page
    b. Table of Contents
    c. Acknowledgements (thanks to client, key sources, others)
    d. Executive Summary (one page)

2. **Body (20-25 pgs.)**
    a. Project Rationale
        i. Statement of the problem (why important and to whom)
        ii. Objectives of the research (general areas of interest & specific client)
        iii. Clearly-defined research question
    b. Background
        i. Summary of topic/policy/program under study
        ii. Other key information that informs your project
    c. Methodology
        i. Discussion of how prior research informed the research plan
        ii. Full explanation of how the study was conducted (including how key concepts were operationalized; data collection; the response rates; and so forth)
    d. Analysis of Findings
        i. Description of data
        ii. Analysis of key relationships etc.
    e. Discussion/Conclusion/Recommendations
        i. Interpretation of data presented in previous section
        ii. Acknowledgements of limits of the study's internal/external validity

3. **Supplemental material (no pg. limit)**
    a. References/Sources Cited
    b. Appendices
        i. Appendix A: name and contact information of the client liaison
        ii. Other appendices if needed (e.g., full text of any questionnaires).

<u>TSPPPA Presentation</u>

Scheduled for May 8th and May 10th. Each team will prepare a 20-minute presentation on your project, which will be followed by 5-10 minutes of questions from faculty and alumni. Condensing an extensive project requires carefully focusing on the most critical elements and findings, rather than attempting to communicate every detail. Consider what are the most important points that you want the audience to take away and emphasize those.

Presentations should include the following:

1. The identity of the client
2. Central research questions, plus their importance to the client
3. Background on the topic—highlighting why this study was needed
4. A brief explanation of the methodology—highlighting all that you did
6. Key Findings and conclusions
7. Recommendations to the client

These two basic criteria will again be used: (1) Style: aiming for an engrossing, lively, focused talk, supplemented with uncluttered, attractive, informative visual aids. (2) Substance: achieving a tightly edited, logically developed, effectively analyzed, and convincingly argued report of the research. Most importantly, you want to leave the audience with an understanding of how your project is: important, rigorous, and useful (to your client).

Client Presentation and Delivery of Final Report

After receiving feedback on your TSPPPA presentation and final report, budget time to then revise them for the client. In particular, this presentation ought to be specially tailored for the client. Most clients prefer an emphasis on the findings and recommendations with less time devoted to the methodology (and even less to background on the policy issue/problem). Do not be surprised if clients also ask for comments on the broader implications of your findings far beyond the actual recommendations in your report. This presentation is not graded, but required for completion of the project. Please note that your research adviser and/or professor will contact clients for their critiques of teams' performances in developing, conducting, and communicating the research.

MPP Program Review

One of the requirements of the MPP program is that you provide end-of-program feedback about your experience here at the Trachtenberg School. This feedback is collected with an anonymous online survey that should take about fifteen minutes to complete. All students enrolled in the Spring 2015 sections of the capstones must complete this survey by March 30. You cannot receive a course grade and graduate until this requirement is met.

Survey responses will be aggregated before being shared with TSPPPA faculty, and will not be shared with faculty until after grades have been submitted. Your specific responses will not be associated with your name. The survey software will, however, track whether you've completed the survey and satisfied the requirements of your capstone course.

You will receive an email about halfway through the Spring semester with more instructions on how to complete the survey. That email will be sent to the email address associated with your Blackboard account, so please be sure that address is correct.

Relevant Trachtenberg School Policies

1. Incompletes: A student must consult with the instructor to obtain a grade of "I" (incomplete) no later than the last day of classes in a semester. At that time, the student and instructor will both sign the CCAS contract for incompletes and submit a copy to the School Director. Please consult the TSPPPA Student Handbook or visit the website for the complete CCAS policy on incompletes.

2. Submission of Written Work Products Outside of the Classroom:
It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that an instructor receives each written assignment. Students can submit written work electronically only with the express permission of the instructor.

3. Submission of Written Work Products after Due Date: Policy on Late Work: All work must be turned in by the assigned due date in order to receive full credit for that assignment, unless an exception is expressly made by the instructor.

4. Academic Honesty: Please consult the "policies" section of the GW student handbook for the university code of academic integrity. Note especially the definition of plagiarism: "intentionally representing the words, ideas, or sequence of ideas of another as one's own in any academic exercise; failure to attribute any of the following: quotations, paraphrases, or borrowed information." All examinations, papers, and other graded work products and assignments are to be completed in conformance with the George Washington University Code of Academic Integrity.

5. Changing Grades after Completion of the Course: No changes can be made in grades after the conclusion of the semester, other than in cases of clerical error.

6. The Syllabus: This syllabus is a guide to the course for students. Sound educational practice requires flexibility and the instructor may therefore, at her/his discretion, change content and requirements during the semester.

7. Accommodation for Students with Disabilities: In order to receive accommodations on the basis of disability, a student must give notice and provide proper documentation from the Office of Disability Support Services, Marvin Center 436 (202-994-8250). Accommodations will be made based upon the recommendations of the DSS Office.