

GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION & URBAN STUDIES
PMAP 8900 PUBLIC SERVICE CAPSTONE:
ADVANCED PROJECTS IN MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE
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COURSE OBJECTIVES

This purpose of this course is to apply the knowledge and skills of management and finance through a capstone project as a requirement for earning the Master of Public Administration degree. Its defining features are that students work on a project with a “real world” client, that the project requires integrating and applying knowledge acquired in multiple courses, and that students work as a team to complete the project. It is possible to complete this course with a self-directed project; however, it is discouraged and rare. Learning to work effectively in teams is a major objective of this course and an essential skill in any organization.

As a capstone for students with a specialization in public management and finance, the course involves projects that may require service delivery assessment, operations analysis, program evaluation, fiscal analysis, or policy analysis. Typically, student teams are asked to develop and assess options to address important problems facing public and nonprofit organizations. Projects will vary based on the needs of clients, but all will require implementing a workplan for evaluating a public problem, collecting and analyzing data, developing findings and recommendations, writing a final report, and presenting findings to the client.

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 when it arises. In addition, students will develop skills in four areas:

1. Project Management

Students should demonstrate the ability to:

- assess the client organization and its environment;
- frame and refine the problem presented by the client;
- develop and implement a work agreement with the client for the project;
- develop and implement a project work plan with timelines and deliverables;
- monitor their progress against the work agreement and work plan;
- revise the work plan as necessary;
- develop well supported and realistic recommendations.

2. Client Management

Students should demonstrate the ability to:

- develop and sustain their relationship with the client;

- negotiate a project work plan with timelines and deliverables (the contract”);
- 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. Team Management

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.

4. Research

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 existing datasets;
- follow established sampling procedures to create appropriate samples for their particular project;
- 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;
- communicate their work effectively both orally and in writing.

PRE-REQUISITE

This course requires the completion of PAUS 8521 (Evaluation Research: Design and Practice). PAUS 8521 is the first course of the capstone sequence, in which students select a client project and develop the workplan that will be implemented this semester. Students who did not complete PAUS 8521 last semester but have completed it in a previous semester will be assigned to a team based on need and topic preference.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The class will involve presentations from the instructor, class discussion, and team meetings. Course requirements include:

- 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.

GRADING AND EVALUATION

Students are graded on the products they deliver to their clients and evidence of learning compared to course objectives. The course has a series of milestones that will serve as interim work products.

Course Milestones

There are a set of milestones (activities and products) that are required of students. Some suggested time frames for milestones are found in parenthesis, though actual timing during the semester may vary depending on the situation of each team and client.

These milestones include:

- development of team norms/team charter (January);
- final version of client contract and workplan signed by all team members and client (January); *(This is the proposal submitted for PAUS 8521—revised based on instructor feedback).*
- outline of final project report to faculty (early March);
- oral presentation of draft final report to class/faculty for feedback (late March/April);
- draft of final report to faculty and client for feedback (mid-April);
- final revised report to faculty for approval to send to client (late April);
- end of course self, team /peer and course evaluations (late April);
- presentation for end event and client (May).

GRADING

1. **Sixty percent (60%)** is based on work products identified in the milestones as well as any interim deliverables to the client or assigned by the faculty member.
2. **Forty percent (40%)** is based on evidence of the individual student's learning through participation in the team's work and class activities and his/her ability to act on peer and faculty feedback (team norms/charter and any revisions during the course). These include:
 - individual and team preparation for any performance at client entry and meetings on their work agreement;
 - end of semester faculty, peer and self-evaluations;
 - individual and team performance on final presentation to client and evaluation of the project and team by the clients.

Within the range of passing grades (A to C), differential assessment will be made primarily on the quality of the written final report and presentation. Grades are the responsibility of the instructor, but I will consult the clients regarding their judgment of the quality of the written product and the team's overall work.

All other things being equal, each team member will receive the same grade based on my evaluation of the team's written product. However, in circumstances where there is clear evidence of uneven contributions among team members, adjustments may be made to individual team member's grades. Since such situations typically are identifiable in advance of submission of the final report, individuals who may be graded differently than the rest of the team typically will be so advised in advance. Written interim peer evaluations will be required by the faculty near the middle of the semester, and another written peer evaluation will be sought near the end of the team's work. These peer evaluations (as well as my independent observation and judgment) will provide a basis for assigning differential grades among team members.

Timeliness and meeting deadlines are important aspects of professional behavior. Accordingly, late projects will be penalized in terms of grading. Teams who do not submit a draft report by March X, 2010, or do not have an approved final report by April X, 2010, will have the grade based on the quality of their report lowered by one full letter grade (for example, from A- to B-) due to lateness.

COURSE ELEMENTS AND TIMETABLE

The course can be divided into the following components:

- *Team Charter Development* – 1 week
- *Workplan Finalization & Implementation* – 12-13 weeks
- *Final Report Drafting and Revisions* – 4-6 weeks
- *Prepare and Deliver Client Final Report and Presentation* – 2 weeks

Each of the components is described more fully below. Components overlap as students begin organizing and writing their final reports and continue to work on their projects.

Week 1: *Team Charter Development*

Team members will be advised on how to write a team charter, which will govern how students complete their client projects. Each team will develop expectations for conduct and work products. Teams must identify roles of individual members, workload requirements, and a process for resolving conflict. Charters must be signed by all team members and approved by the instructor.

Charters are due at the beginning of class in Week 2.

Weeks 2 – 14: *Workplan Finalization & Implementation*

During this period, teams will finalize their workplans developed in PAUS 8521 and work with their clients to complete the project. The instructor will schedule periodic meetings with each team to assess progress and provide advice. The timing of these meetings will be linked to the scheduled dates for completion of interim work products and other milestones identified in the workplan.

In addition, the class will meet as a whole approximately once per month during this period. These sessions will deal with common problems and tasks.

Weeks 10 – 15: *Final Report Drafting and Presentation*

The outcome of the capstone project is a final report to the client and a presentation for the client based on that report. The written report will be submitted twice to the client, once as a draft for feedback and a second time as a final product on the day of the client presentation.

The procedure for submitting a final written report to the client requires these steps:

1. Submission of a draft of the report to the instructor and client
2. Meeting with the faculty member and client to receive comments and suggestions for revisions
3. Preparation of a revised report and submission to the faculty member for approval
4. Approval from the faculty member to submit the report to the client.

Professional work typically is revised several times before final submission. You should anticipate the need for revising your final report and allow sufficient time for this process.

CAPSTONE END EVENT

The last class meeting will be a capstone end event in which all capstone teams are expected to present their findings and recommendations to their clients. This is a festive yet professional occasion where all PMAP faculty and students are invited to listen to presentations.

REFERENCE MATERIALS

There are no required texts for this course. However, listed below are useful reference materials of two types. The first provide a guide to the type of analysis that typically is required for client projects; the second are guides to the process of working in teams and making presentations.

Overviews of Analytic Frameworks

Bardach, Eugene, *A Practical Guide to Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*, CQ Press, 2005, 2nd edition.

Bryson, John M. *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*, Jossey-Bass, 2004, 3rd edition.

Hatry, Harry, Louis Blair, Donald Fisk and Wayne Kimmel, *Program Analysis for State and Local Governments*, The Urban Institute, 1987.

Keehley, Patricia and Neil Abercrombie. *Benchmarking in the Public and Nonprofit Sectors: Best Practices for Achieving Performance Breakthroughs*, 2008, 2nd Edition

MacRae, Duncan and Dale Whittington, *Expert Advice for Policy Choice: Analysis and Discourse*, Georgetown University Press, 1997.

Poister, Theodore H. *Measuring Performance in Public and Nonprofit Organizations*, Jossey-Bass, 2003.

Redburn, F. Stevens, Robert J. Shea and Terry F. Buss, eds. *Performance Management and Budgeting: How Governments Can Learn from Experience*, National Academy of Public Administration, 2008.

Rossi, Peter H. and Howard E. Freeman, *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach*, Sage Publications, 1993, 5th edition.

Working in Teams and as Consultants

Baker, Sunny and Kim Baker, *On Time/On Budget: A Step-by-Step Guide for Managing Any Project*, Prentice Hall, 1992.

Block, Peter, *Flawless Consulting: A Guide to Getting Your Expertise Used*, Second Edition, Jossey-Bass Pfeiffer, 2000

Katzenbach, John and Douglas Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams: Creating a High Performance Organization*, Harvard Business School Press, 1993