

Capstone

School of Public Affairs and Administration

Rutgers University- Newark Campus

Course Information

Course Title: Capstone; 20:834:563:03

Professor: Rachel Emas, Ph.D.

Term: Spring 2018

Class Meetings: Wednesdays, 6:00-8:40pm; CPS 104

Contact Information

Email: rachel.emas@rutgers.edu or re212@newark.rutgers.edu

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 4:30-5:30pm and by appointment as needed

Office Location: CPS 317

Office Phone: 973-353-3980

Introduction

The Capstone course provides graduating students in the Master of Public Affairs program with an opportunity to apply learned theory to practice. As it is required in the final semester of the MPA program, this course is designed as a culminating experience in which students draw upon the knowledge and skills they have gained throughout the degree program.

In the conception and completion of an original and independent research project, students will:

1. Identify an organizational or policy problem, and present relevant contextual and background material;
2. Articulate a research question regarding this problem;
3. Review relevant public administration literature, theoretical frameworks, and best practices;
4. Select appropriate data sources, collection methods, and assessment methodologies;
5. Analyze data and interpret these results;
6. Develop recommendations derived from the research findings; and
7. Complete a final written report and oral presentation which effectively communicates this research project.

Thus, by the conclusion of this course, students will have developed and demonstrated effective research, analytical, critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills; all of these capacities are crucial for successful public or non-profit leaders and managers.

Course Objectives

- In all aspects of the course, students will demonstrate their knowledge of and capacity to apply frameworks, theories, and concepts derived from classes throughout the MPA program.

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- Analytical, problem solving, research, and critical thinking skills of students will be further developed with the conception, completion, and presentation of an original and independent research project.
- Students will articulate and apply a public service perspective in the identification and analysis of an issue, problem, or relationship in the public or nonprofit sector, and the creation, evaluation, and communication of specific recommendations.
- Students will enhance and exhibit their communication skills, both oral and written, throughout the course.

Student Learning Outcomes

- 1. To be able to lead and manage in public governance.**
2. To participate in and contribute to the public policy process.
- 3. To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions.**
4. To articulate and apply a public service perspective.
5. To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenship.

Course Materials

The RECOMMENDED textbook for this course is *The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project*, 2nd edition, by Zina O’Leary, 2013. ISBN 978144625897. Although this book is not required, many students may benefit from the information provided therein.

Students will also read additional items as appropriate for research of their Capstone projects, such as journal articles, government and organization reports, book chapters, etc. In their selection of these materials, students should refer to the document titled Potential Sources of Research provided in the Handouts and Worksheets folder in Course Documents on Blackboard or seek advice from the instructor regarding reliable and reputable sources of information.

Assignments

In class discussions, the weekly course meetings will focus on the knowledge necessary for the conception, development, and completion of an original and independent Capstone Project. Additionally, the class will be separated into small groups, which will serve as Peer Review Teams.

- Peer Review Teams
 - o Each week, these teams will spend some class time discussing the progress on individual projects of its group members or completing a group activity.
 - Peer Review and Critique
 - Group members will review, summarize, and constructively critique the work of another group member in a 2-4-page written assignment.
 - This Peer Review and Critique assignment will focus specifically on the correct application of public administration literature, theoretical knowledge, best practices, and methods and methodologies of analysis in the project.

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- Students must provide a draft of their Capstone to their Peer Reviewer by March 21.
 - The Peer Review and Critique is due to the instructor, submitted in both hard copy and electronically, on March 28. This assignment is worth 10 points.
- CITI Training
- Each student is required to complete the CITI training modules and submit the CITI Certificate in hard copy to the instructor.
 - Student must visit <https://orra.rutgers.edu/citi> and register with the site, then students should select the "CITI Human Subject Protections Basic Course" and "Social / Behavioral / Epidemiologic Research Investigators, Study Staff, or Students" when prompted to choose a specific training course.
 - Frequently Asked Questions are answered at the Rutgers' Office of Research Regulatory Affairs at <https://orra.rutgers.edu/citifaq>.
- Capstone Project Assignment
- Capstone Topic Proposals
 - **In the first class, students will bring with them a 1-page summary of their Capstone topic idea.** This proposal is just the first step of the selection and refinement of the Capstone project.
 - This proposal should include information on the problems or relationships to be addressed, potential research question(s), data sources, analysis methods, and any other information which the student has available.
 - As more information is provided to the instructor, more feedback and guidance can be provided to the student.
 - Capstone Components
 - Throughout the course, some of the components of the Capstone will be treated as individual assignments to ensure that students are making adequate progress towards the final Capstone assignment.
 - Students have the option of submitting drafts of these individual assignments prior to the required submission of the graded assignment.
 - When submitting **an ungraded draft**, students should **ONLY submit a hard copy of the document** to the instructor. Students should **NOT upload any ungraded, optional drafts to Blackboard**.
 - After students submit these individual assignments, both the optional drafts and required graded documents, the instructor will return the documents with feedback, suggestions, and comments for improvement.
 - It is strongly recommended that students take into account these suggestions and feedback when revising their work throughout the semester, especially in the final Capstone Report.
 - When the **graded components** of the Capstone are due, students **MUST submit a hard copy to the instructor AND submit each assignment to Blackboard in order to receive credit**. See the sections below on Graded Assignments and Assignment Submission, as well as the Course Calendar.

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- Introduction and Literature Review
 - Introduction/Background
 - Discussion of the background of the issue, organization, and/or policy's background and context
 - Identification of research question(s) or objective(s) and brief overview of the way the paper will address the question(s)
 - Literature Review
 - Identification, review, and synthesis of previous literature, relevant frameworks and theories which support this research, and best practices which have been used to address similar problems
 - Indicate gap in current knowledge which the research will fill
- Research Design and Methods
 - Explanation of how the specific framework, theory, or model will be applied to the problem
 - Identification of research question(s) and/or objectives, hypotheses (if appropriate)
 - Identification of the relationship between the variables, and the variables' definitions, operationalization, and indicators
 - Information on data sources, collection, and analysis methods and procedures, and support the fitness of these methods
 - Address issues of research ethics (consent, confidentiality, etc.), validity, and reliability
- Final Capstone Report
 - Each student will prepare a 25-35-page Capstone Report that analyzes and addresses a specific problem, issue, or question confronted in the public or nonprofit sector.
 - There are many types of projects appropriate for this assignment; these include, but are not limited to, a single or comparative case study, program evaluation, policy assessment, or quantitative research study.
 - The Capstone Report must demonstrate the application of frameworks, theories, and concepts acquired throughout the MPA curriculum, as well as the skills and capacities developed during the program.
 - This final Capstone Report should include
 - a clearly stated **problem** that is of theoretical and/or practical importance to the field;
 - a number of **questions** that are framed in a way so that they can be answered, and the answers can produce understanding of and provide solutions to the broader problem being addressed;
 - research **methods** that are appropriate, well-explained, and can be implemented;
 - collection and cleaning of **data, evidence, and information** that are suitable and rich enough to answer the questions;
 - data **analyses** that are appropriate and helpful in producing results; and

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- an **explanation** of how these results suggest solutions to the problem and the significance of these findings.
- Final Capstone Presentation
 - Students will prepare and deliver a 12-15-minute public presentation which briefly covers all aspects of the Capstone Project report.
 - If a student fails to remain within this time limit, they will be penalized in their presentation grade.
 - Student may use PowerPoint or Prezi, but are not required to do so.
 - Through a process of questioning by audience members, students will also defend their Capstone reports methodologically, theoretically, and substantively.

Grading Policy

Grading for this course shall be on a standard scale as follows:

A = 90-100; B+ = 87-89; B = 80-86; C+ = 77-79; C = 70-76; F = below 70.

A grade of “A” is reserved for students whose performance is “Outstanding,” who have mastered the material and turned in exemplary work. They are able to articulate a concept, but also understand the relationships among different concepts, as well as demonstrate the practical implications of theories and ideas. A grade of “B+” corresponds with “Very Good” performance. A grade of “B” is given for “Good” performance. These grades mean that the student understands the basics of the material, but has not demonstrated these linkages and relationships. A grade of “C+” or “C” generally means that the student has not mastered the material well, and does not understand and is unable to communicate concepts and their relevance. The grade of “C” corresponds with “Satisfactory” performance.

Graded Assignments

- CITI completion	5%
- Participation	5%
- Peer Review and Critique	10%
- Introduction and Literature Review	15%
- Research Design	15%
- Final Capstone Paper	30%
- Final Capstone Presentation	20%

Course Policies

- Communication
 - All communication regarding course scheduling, readings, and assignments will be distributed through Blackboard.
 - Check the email account associated with Blackboard periodically to ensure that you receive these messages.

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- Class Sessions: Ground Rules
 - Students are to arrive on time and prepared, having completed the readings and assignments due.
 - Respectful and informed discussions are central to the success of the class and students are expected to actively participate in class deliberations.
 - If a student fails to maintain respect during a class session, they will be asked to leave and points will be deducted from their participation grade.
 - If you plan to use a computer or tablet to take notes during class, use good judgement when doing so and be sure to maintain your participation.
 - Please silence or turn off cell phones during class time. If there is an emergency, please inform the instructor.

Written Assignments

The capacity to communicate effectively is a critical skill for all professionals, but especially so for public and non-profit administrators. In all assignments, writing should be clear, focused, and understandable. All work must be carefully proofread prior to submission; this includes a detailed review of spelling, syntax, and grammar, as well as ensuring a logical structure and coherent flow to the writing and adherence to the basic formatting requirements listed below.

- Submission Requirements
 - On the due date of each assignment, **students MUST submit a hard copy to the instructor AND upload the assignment to Blackboard to receive credit.**
 - If a student completely fails to submit these graded assignments via **EITHER** method, they will not receive any credit for that assignment.
 - If a student uploads an assignment on time, but provides a **hard copy AFTER the due date, that work will be marked late and deducted points** (unless due to a documented emergency).
 - Barring significant and exceptional circumstances, such as medical emergencies or death in the family, late assignments will not be accepted. If such an emergency arises, please petition the instructor to accept a late assignment in writing and with appropriate documentation in a timely manner.
 - Without appropriate documentation and notice to the instructor, no accommodations will be made for late assignments.
 - There are no “re-dos”, no extra credit, and no substitutionary credit.
- Formatting Requirements
 - Double-spaced, single-sided printing
 - Standard 12-point font (such as Times New Roman or Calibri)
 - 1-inch margins on all sides
 - Numbered pages
 - Headings: name, date, title of assignment, and course title and section number
- Citations
 - **All non-original work MUST be cited, in text and at the end of the document, in APA format**, including both published and unpublished sources.

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- APA citation formatting help can be found at Purdue University Online Writing Lab: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>.
- **In order to avoid plagiarism, other people's words MUST be quoted and cited, and other people's ideas must be cited.**
 - For an overview avoiding plagiarism, please visit the Purdue University Online Writing Lab: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>.
- Sources of Information
 - Well-regarded and reliable sources of information and data can be found in peer-reviewed journals, textbooks, government studies, and reports from non-partisan research centers, institutes, and laboratories.
 - Do not cite or depend upon Wikipedia, blogs, online encyclopedia or dictionaries, or other unreliable sources.
 - Certain magazines or news outlets (such as Time Magazine, The Economist, The Guardian, Scientific American, The New York Times, etc.) may also offer useful material, but these sources should be used rarely and only in conjunction with or as supported by scholarly, empirical, or primary sources.
 - If you have any questions regarding the appropriateness of a specific source, please ask the instructor or refer to the list of reliable sources of information, reports, data, etc. provided on Blackboard.

SPAA Writing Center

For any further help with writing skills or editing, students may reach out to the School of Public Affairs and Administration Writing Center, which provides writing tutoring and writing workshops to all students currently enrolled. The SPAA Writing Center is located in the Center for Urban and Public Service (CPS) Room 125. An appointment can be arranged by sending an email tlh135@scarletmail.rutgers.edu or calling 973-353-2571. More information can be found at <https://spaa.newark.rutgers.edu/writing-career-development-center>.

Disputes about Grades

If a student believes that a grade was received in error due to the fault or oversight of the instructor, the work will be reviewed to determine if a change is warranted. This request for review for a grade change must be made in writing via a signed memo within seven calendar days of the graded assignment being returned to the student.

Academic Integrity

Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, or any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.

Students are required to submit all graded written assignments through TurnItIn on Blackboard. If a student is caught plagiarizing on an assignment, they will receive a grade of 0 on that assignment. University procedures will be followed to ensure that the plagiarism is punished to the maximum extent possible.

The Rutgers' Code of Student Conduct is available at <https://slwordpress.rutgers.edu/studentconduct/wp-content/uploads/sites/46/2014/12/December2014UCSC.pdf>. The Rutgers' Academic Integrity Policy is available at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>.

Support and Resources¹

In this course, as well as this graduate program, School, and University, we will work to assess and address social challenges that may include sensitive topics. Each student must be respectful and courteous of others' beliefs, opinions, and perspectives. If any student cannot remain civil and polite during a class session, they will be asked to leave and points will be deducted from their participation grade.

It is the instructor's goal that students from all backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in the classroom and the community, and that the diversity that we all bring to this class be viewed as a significant source of strength. In this course, the instructor seeks to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity of gender, gender identity, sexuality, disability, ancestry, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, and culture.

Please feel free to contact the instructor:

- to request the use of a pronoun or name different from that provided by Registrar's Office;
- if any class meetings conflict with a religious event or holiday; or
- to offer suggestions on how to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups

Students who in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS).

- Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide me with a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS. Accommodations cannot be provided retroactively, so please let the instructor know as early as possible.

Rutgers University-Newark works to provide a first-rate education to an exceptionally diverse community and the comprehensive support necessary for student success. Links for many of these support services are provided below:

- [Rutgers Newark Office of Disability Services](#)
 - o Site: <http://roberson.rutgers.edu/disability-services/>

¹ Much of this language was drawn together from The Center on Teaching and Learning at Yale University; accessible at <http://ctl.yale.edu/DiversityStatements>.

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- Office: Paul Robeson Campus Center- Suite 219
- Email: ODSNewark@Newark.Rutgers.edu
- Phone: (973) 353-5375
- [Rutgers Office of Disability Services](#)
 - Site: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>
 - Office: Lucy Stone Hall- Suite A145, Piscataway, NJ
 - Email: ODSNewark@Newark.Rutgers.edu
 - Phone: (848) 445-6800
- [Office of International Student and Scholar Services](#)
 - Site: <http://ncas.rutgers.edu/oiss>
 - Office: Conklin Hall- Room 216
 - Email: oiss@newark.rutgers.edu
 - Phone: (973) 353-1427
- [LGBTQ and Intercultural Resource Center](#)
 - Site: <http://lgbt.newark.rutgers.edu/>
 - Office: Paul Robeson Campus Center- Room 352
 - Phone: (973) 353-3416
- [Rutgers Center for Gender, Sexuality, Law and Policy](#)
 - Site: <https://cgslp.rutgers.edu/>
 - Office: 123 Washington Street
 - Email: cgslp@law.rutgers.edu
- [Rutgers Newark Counseling Center](#)
 - Site: <http://counseling.newark.rutgers.edu/>
 - Phone: (973) 353-5805

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Course Calendar*

Date	Topic	Recommended Readings	Assignments Due
January 17	Introduction and Capstone Overview	Chapters 1-2	Capstone Idea
January 24	Problem Statements and Research Questions	Chapters 3-4	CITI Training Report
January 31	Literature Review	Chapters 6-7	
February 7	Research Design and Methods	Chapters 8-13 (depends on methodology)	Draft Intro and Literature Review** (optional)
February 14	Research Design and Methods	Chapters 8-13 (depends on methodology)	
February 21	Analyzing Results	Chapters 14-15	Draft Research Design** (optional)
February 28	Research Ethics, Validity, and Reliability	Chapter 16	Intro and Literature Review***
March 7	NO CLASS- Professor at Conference		
March 14	NO CLASS- Spring Break		
March 21	Constructive Criticism		Research Design***
March 28	Final Reports and Presentation Guidance		Draft Capstone to Peer Reviewer
April 4	NO CLASS- Work on Capstone		
April 11	Individual progress meetings		Peer Review and Critique***
April 18	Capstone Presentations		
April 25	Capstone Presentations		Final Capstone Report***

* The instructor reserves the right to alter the course schedule as needed.

** These **ungraded draft capstone components are OPTIONAL**; thus, students should **NOT submit these assignments to Blackboard and ONLY submit in hard copy**.

*** When **graded assignments are due**, students **MUST submit a hard copy to the instructor AND upload each assignment to Blackboard by the due date** in order to receive credit.