Capstone Project Syllabus
Fall 2013

I. Course: 20:831:563 Capstone; Fridays 4:00 p.m. to 6:40 p.m.

II. Credits: Three

III. Faculty: Robert Shick, Ph.D. Room 336, SPAA Office Hours: by arrangement Voice: 973-353-5336; Fax: 973-353-5097; e-mail: Blackboard or rshick@newark.rutgers.edu

PLEASE TURN OFF CELL PHONES AND PAGERS DURING CLASS

IV. Course Rationale: The capstone constitutes the exit requirement for the MPA Program. The capstone project provides students an opportunity to integrate knowledge and skills learned in the MPA curriculum in an applied examination of a relevant public administration issue.

V. Course Overview: Public administration concepts and applications contained in the curriculum are integrated through systematic examination (i.e., research and evaluation) of a selected public administration issue or problem. Under guidance of a faculty member, individual students or student teams develop a focused problem/issue statement, situational analysis, and study design and action plan. Individual students or student teams collect relevant evidence, present it and analyze the results to draw conclusions and make recommendations. Individual students or student teams prepare a comprehensive report and deliver an oral presentation to peers, faculty members, and guests.

VI. Course Objectives: The course is designed to:

- Increase student capacity to identify problems and their situational contexts, determine a reasonable method for studying a specific problem, collect relevant evidence, analyze it, draw logical conclusions from the evidence, and make recommendations for improvement that are consistent with study findings;
• Apply knowledge and enhance skills learned in core and specialization courses (core content knowledge, research, teamwork, analysis, judgment, decision making, problem-solving, writing and presentation);
• Build capacity and confidence to carry out systematic inquiry by
  o identifying a problem or issue, sometimes in consultation with a client,
  o defining project goals and methods,
  o developing and carrying out a project action plan,
  o setting and accomplishing project goals,
  o making convincing arguments,
  o using multiple sources and forms of data and evidence,
  o analyzing and making judgments under uncertainty and deadline conditions.
• Provide practice in developing a comprehensive report and presenting salient points to an audience of peers and professionals.

VII. Course Time Commitments:

• Class: Three hours per week class and consultation time

• Assignments: Students must spend considerable time on the Internet and in libraries identifying, downloading, reading, and summarizing relevant literature and collecting evidence. The purpose of a literature search is to: 1) provide material for problem identification, background, situation, and guiding question(s), 2) provide concepts, models and variables for project design and implementation, and 3) provide quantitative and qualitative studies for background and evaluating study results. Students develop a background paper, guiding question and a project design. Students then carry out the project, collecting primary and secondary data, analyzing it, and writing the results for the final project. Students develop conclusions and recommendations from the results. Students prepare and present a Power Point presentation to classmates and guests. Students complete project-related tasks within and outside of class time. Students must make the project a priority for the semester to ensure quality in the results. This is not a project that can be completed in the final weeks of the semester. Each student must follow a plan and stay on task, complete project assignments and make timely contributions to project documents. The goal is to complete a quality analysis under conditions of uncertainty and constraints typical of real world evaluation projects.

VIII. Prerequisite Courses: The capstone project should be completed in the last semester of study.

IX. Attendance and Participation Policy: Attendance and participation are essential to the learning process. Prior notice of unavoidable absences is expected.

X. Cell Phones: Please turn off your cell phones and pagers during class, or put them on vibration mode. Check for messages and return calls during the break.
XI. **Professional Behavior Expectations:** Professional Behavior Expectations: Graduate students are expected to be self-motivated and serious about learning. Students in capstone courses must treat each other with respect and professional courtesy. The focus should always be on completing a quality project.

XII. **Required Texts/Other Resources:** The texts assigned are guidance tools and hence are not meant to be read page by page but rather to be browsed and consulted throughout the process (and kept for future guidance). It is a resource, not a book to be “learned”. Texts from other core curriculum and specialization courses also may be helpful in designing and carrying out the capstone project.


PowerPoint is required for presentations. Word, Excel, and/or SPSS (or equivalents) are required for analysis and preparation of reports and presentations.

All written assignments and the final Capstone paper are to be done in Times New Roman, 12-point font with standard one-inch margins.

XIII. **Required Additional Readings and Skills:** Each student is responsible for identifying and acquiring scholarly literature on the topic addressed, in particular major policy issues and implementation challenges, empirical studies, stakeholder perspectives, best practices. Knowledge of Blackboard is also required (tutorials are found on-line at the Blackboard site). Access to Blackboard is on the Rutgers-Newark web page.

XIV. **Students with Special Needs:** If a student feels he/she needs accommodation for a disability, please make that known to the instructor. Every reasonable effort will be made to accommodate needs. The University has resources to support students with special needs.

XV. The grade of “A” is reserved for outstanding work, which encompasses, excellent content in terms of writing and analysis, timely submission of assignments, professionalism of results, and contributions to class discussions.

Each team member earns the same grade for the project report. Individual assignments earn individual grades. Team members must edit the project document into a coherent whole for an
“A” grade (compilation of individual drafts into a group whole does not merit an “A”). Teamwork is essential to a team members’ grade based on a fair contributions to the whole, including timely submissions to team projects. All students must participation in class, discussions, and formal presentations for an “A” grade. Late project reports do not earn an "A."

Grades will usually be given in letter form, and then translated into a number format. Final grades are based on a weighted average of each component of the course.

A    (93 or above)
B+  (88 – 92.9)
B    (84 – 87)
B-   (80 – 83.9)
C+   (76 – 79.9)
C    (72 – 75.9)
F    (Below 72)

XVI. Plagiarism and Cheating: Plagiarism is ANY form of taking others’ work without giving them credit. This means it is important to know the differences between quoting, paraphrasing and summarizing. It is also important to know how to cite material properly. A style guide will help prevent several forms of plagiarism related to written assignments. A style guide identifies what needs to be cited and explains how various types of sources should be listed (see text requirements). Please refer to the Diana Hacker, A Writer’s Reference, Sixth Edition previously mentioned for the appropriate rules for citing material in APA style. Plagiarism is a form of cheating, but there are other forms as well. Cheating in the capstone courses can take the form of not contributing one’s fair share to the team effort, that is, not completing assignments, being late with assignments, missing team meetings and not communicating with your teammates. Plagiarism and cheating can result in failing the course. Your paper may be analyzed using plagiarism software; which specifically identifies material taken from other sources, and the names of those sources. Plagiarism is a very serious matter, which will have a significant affect on your grade.

XVII. Course Products and Assessments:

- Interim Assignments          20%
- Reflection Journal (Individual) (8 pages)    10%
- Report Presentation          10%
- Project Report (Team)        50%
- Attendance, Participation, Self and Peer Evaluations (Individual) 10%

XVIII. Project Document: The project document is built a step at a time. Careful documentation of everything as it is done is critical. You must document evidence as it is gathered. The documentation becomes part of the final report content or an appendix. Among the items of documentation are: field notes of observations and records; reports of interviews with stakeholders (tapes preferred); team meeting content notes (each person completes as part of...
their journal notes on discussions, ideas, sources, key actors, to do lists); **summaries or highlighted copies of relevant documents, media reports and academic articles** used in the analysis. **References and citations**, including URLs with date that an item is extracted, are required. **Source data:** many types of source data are available and multiple types of sources will be required in a project.

**XIX. Journal:** The Journal is an 8-page document. The Journal is prepared by each student individually, and should have entries of two or more paragraphs every three weeks (a total of five entries) and a final review of the capstone process for a sixth entry. Here is the opportunity for you to chronicle your experience and to talk about what was good and what was not so good, and how the process affected you personally. How did the capstone experience change the way you think, your aspirations, the way you behave. How has it affected your perceptions of accomplishing a goal under conditions of uncertainty, time pressure, a million details, and constant decision-making? How close was the experience to what you deal with in your workplace? There are no wrong things to say, so just provide an honest assessment of this intense and intimate experience.

**XX. Class Meetings and Individual Team Conferences:** The Capstone course is an especially dynamic environment, wherein the work at hand influences the pace and process of completion of each project. The course involves in-class meetings, team conferences, and weeks in which the class may not meet, and students will work on their projects independently. The instructor reserves the right to make adjustments in the schedule based on the dynamics of the class and the nature of projects. (The weekly schedule may change based on the needs of the class. This will be discussed with the class.)

**XXI. Schedule**

**Introduction**

- Overview. Syllabus. Project requirements: notes, journals, meetings, organization of material. Browsing the textbooks.
- Components of capstone project: background/guiding question/logic model framework; evidence-gathering plan and expectations; findings/analysis; conclusions/recommendations
- Discussion of topics
- Logic model framework
- Literature and sources: theoretical, conceptual, methodological, empirical, review – what’s the difference?
- Review of literature already collected.
- Select Teams

Readings: None
Week 2  

**Background/Guiding Question/Logic Model:**

- Review Hancock, Chapters 1 through 13
- Background: Purpose, topic, scope, importance to PA
- Guiding Questions
- Logic framework to describe topic/problem/issue;
- Topic ideas
- Logic Model Online Individual Learning Course http://www.uwex.edu/ces/lmcourse/#

Readings: Hancock, Chapters 1 through 13

Assignment: Complete Logic Model Course in URL above. Prepare Topic/Problem Background (2 pages).

Week 3  

**Meetings with Teams re Background/Guiding Question/Logic Model**

Readings: None

Assignment: Logic Model and Description (3 pages) and guiding question (1 page).

Week 4  

**Literature Review and Meetings with Teams re Literature Review**

Assignment: Redraft of Background, Guiding Question, and Logic Model and Description

Readings: None

Week 5  

**Evidence Gathering Plan and Expectations**

Six data sources
- Data/evidence collection links to logic framework
- Data collection methods, instruments.

Readings: Handout

Assignment: Prepare draft literature review.
Week 6  
*Data Instruments, Data Collection Strategies, and Methodology*

- Discussion of preliminary action plans and instruments
- Data instrument development, collection strategies

Readings: Handout

Assignment: Develop methodology, preliminary data collection plan, and instruments.

Week 7  
*Meetings with Teams re Background, Guiding Question, Logic Model, Literature Review, and Methodology*

Week 8  
*Meetings with Teams re Data Collection and Evidence Gathering Plan*

Readings: None

Assignment: Redraft of Literature Review and data collection plan and instruments.

Week 9  
*Analysis/Results/Findings*

- Arraying evidence in the context of the logic framework;
- Reporting data/evidence results;
- Triangulation: convergence and divergence;
- Generating and reporting findings per guiding questions;
- Assignment: Continue evidence collection and analysis, seek additional literature, documents, insights

Readings: Handout

Week 10  
*Analysis, Results and Findings Team Meetings*

Readings: Handout

Week 11  
*Meetings with Teams re Analysis/Results/Findings*

Assignment: Prepare preliminary write-up of analysis, results, findings, and conclusions.

Week 12  
*Conclusions/Recommendations in Context of Guiding Question*

- Triangulation and judgment;
- Drawing conclusions consistent with the evidence;
• Making recommendations consistent with conclusions;
• Evaluating recommendations

Assignments: Prepare Draft PowerPoint Presentation; begin compiling final report.

Week 13  Final Meeting with Teams

Week 14  Project Presentations (Guests are welcome.)

Week 15  Submit Bound Copy of Capstone Project Report
SECTIONS OF CAPSTONE PROJECT PAPER

BACKGROUND
GUIDING QUESTION
LOGIC MODEL
LITERATURE REVIEW
METHODOLOGY
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
ATTACHMENTS
REFERENCES