

Spring 2011
Syllabus (Subject to Change)

PA 590 – CAPSTONE RESEARCH COURSE
Room 110 CUPPA Hall
Meeting Time: Monday/Variable between 5-8pm

Margaret LaPorte, Ph.D.
CUPPA Hall Room 128
(312) 996-5129
mlapor1@uic.edu

WEB PAGE: We will be using the Blackboard web site for purposes of communication in this course and distribution of readings or other class material. You have access to the Blackboard website at <http://blackboard.uic.edu>.

OFFICE HOURS: I am generally available in my office; feel free to call, email, or stop by. You may also set up an appointment by phone or e-mail.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES: The primary objective of the capstone course is to apply and integrate the classroom learning you have received thus far in the MPA program with a relevant problem solving experience in an actual work situation. A solicitation has been made of government and nonprofit agencies in the Chicago area for projects on which students could work. Agencies were told that the project must be one that: 1) could be completed by a team of 3-4 students within a 15-week period, and 2) required the use of data collection, research and analysis skills. In developing the final list of potential projects, an attempt was made to provide some variation with regard to subject area (general management, financial management, and information management) and with regard to context (local government, federal government, nonprofit organization).

Capstone projects are assigned to groups based on individual preferences among the list of projects and student qualifications. When applicable, I will assign readings to each group pertaining to the subject matter of the project or the analyses required. Students are encouraged to meet with me, or other faculty members with expertise in their project area, for guidance on subject matter and analysis.

The class will meet on an irregular basis to bring guest speakers in to discuss topics such as project management, consulting work skills, and working in teams. There may be some readings associated with these presentations. Several sessions are scheduled in which teams will discuss their projects, what progress they have made, problems or issues encountered etc.

A significant amount of off-campus work is required in this class. Students should anticipate spending significant time with the client and at the client's worksite. It is also likely that students will spend a significant time doing research. Research may be done at home, at the office, at the library or with organizations other than the client organization. For example, a team working for a municipality on a project may want to learn what other municipalities are doing in this regard.

In light of the limited number of class meeting and readings, it is expected that students will spend approximately **10-15 hours each, per week**, on their team project.

Students should anticipate incurring some travel, data collection, and copying costs associated with their projects. There are no books for this class and these costs can be considered to be in lieu of book costs.

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The nature of the course is such that it would be extremely disruptive to a team were a student to drop the course after the semester has started. Students will therefore not be allowed to drop the course except in the most extreme circumstances.

SKILL REQUIREMENTS

- *Data Analysis*
- *Teamwork*: Students will work in teams of 3-4 in this class. It is critical that students be able to work effectively in a team environment.
- *Project Management*: The deadline for completion of the projects is tight and projects must be effectively managed. Students need to identify the tasks to be completed and plan ahead for purposes of ensuring that all tasks are completed in a timely way.
- *Written Communication*: The primary deliverable for most teams is a report on their project with findings and recommendations that will be presented to the client agency.
- *Oral Communication*: A second deliverable is an oral presentation of the report to the client.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS

- Memorandum of Understanding / Cooperative Agreement: The first course product will be a memorandum of understanding (also called a cooperative agreement) between the student team and the client. The MOU will specify project scope, schedule, deliverables, and the role of the client in helping to complete the project. It will also contain a disclaimer about the accuracy of content, future responsibility of the Department of Public Administration, etc. A guide to writing the MOU and a template for the disclaimer are available on Blackboard
- Project Plan / Work Plan: The second product will be a plan setting forth a schedule by which the project is to be completed, the specific tasks to be completed, the estimated number of hours for each task, deadlines, who is doing what, possible bottlenecks, potential sources of data and information, etc. The plan should contain interim deliverables and milestone dates, and the key questions that have to be answered to complete the project.
- Team Participation: The requirements for this class will be completed as a team. It is essential that students learn to work effectively in a team environment. To provide an incentive, a portion of the final grade will consist of a review of each student's performance as a team member by the other members of the team.
- Report: The primary product is the completed report. A draft of the final report is due by **April 4th**. The final written version of the report will be delivered to the client by **not later than April 25, 2011**
- Oral Presentation: Oral presentations to the client will be made **May 2-6, 2011**. The instructor will be present at all presentations.
- Customer Feedback: The instructor will solicit feedback from the client on the performance of the student team. This feedback will be figured into the grade.

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EVALUATION:

Students will be graded according to the following point system:

Memorandum of Understanding	10%
Project Plan	10%
Draft Report	10%
Final Report	25%
Team participation and peer evaluation	15%
Oral presentation	20%
Customer feedback	10%
TOTAL	100%

READINGS:

Readings relevant to each group's subject matter and analyses may be assigned and will be available on Blackboard.

SCHEDULE

Dec. 13, 2010	Preliminary meeting to discuss project proposals and determine the set of projects for Spring 2011 course. Team selections made by students
December 20, 2010 (No Class)	Participating organizations are notified by instructor. Final assignment to project teams and determined by instructor and teams notified via e-mail by instructor. Teams should consider setting up a secure website to share material with one another and the instructor (e.g. Googlegroups)
Dec. 20, 2010/ January 7, 2011 (No Class)	Teams contact clients for purpose of developing an MOU. Students should contact clients by phone or email first to introduce the team and request meeting. The in-person meeting is critical for introducing the team and discussing the scope of work. Students are required to have at least one in-person meeting prior to Jan. 10, 2011 . Each team should have developed a <u>draft</u> MOU and work breakdown plan for the January 10th class.
January 10, 2011	Instruction Begins Lecture Topic: Working in Teams Draft MOU's Due - Teams meet in class to discuss progress and MOU. <i>Bring a copy of your draft MOU to class</i>
Jan. 17th (No Class)	Holiday
Jan. 24th	Lecture Topic: Project Work Plans Final Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) due to instructor

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- Jan. 31st** **Work Plans** – Bring project materials and be ready to work on your work breakdown plans during class. *Bring a laptop if you have one and markers, pens, and post-it sticky notes.*
- February** **Teams set appointments to meet with instructor to discuss project as needed. Teams meet with clients to discuss project timelines/deliverables as needed. Teams should use this time to finalize the project work plans.**
- Feb. 28th** **Project Work Plans Due** (including timeline and task outline)
Capstone Survivor’s Panel
Guest Speakers:
 - *Marla Parker*: MPA S09
 - *Lauren Bowman*: MPA S09
 - *Mattie Whipple* - MPA S09
 - *John Colon*: MPA S09
- March 7th** Lecture Topic: Effective Project Management
Guest Lecturer – Jeff Gawel
- March 14th** **Lecture Topic: Writing with numbers & effectively visualizing data** Students will learn best practices for building graphs and charts and using data effectively in reports.
- March 21st** **Spring Break**
(No Class)
- March 28th** **Lecture Topic: Oral Presentations**
Students will learn best practices for giving oral presentations.
- April 4th** **DRAFT REPORT DUE*****
(No Class) **Deliver one copy of your report to the instructor (electronically and/or hardcopy in person.) Provide copies of your report to each member of two groups (yours and your reviewer team).**
- PEER REVIEW:** Each student is required to read and review two team reports. This peer-review system will enable each team to get feedback from peers while also giving teams the opportunity to see what other teams are doing and look for possible tips for their own report writing.
All peer reviews (written comments) are due April 11th in class.

Capstone Team Designation	1 st Team Report Your Team Will Review	2 nd Team Report Your Team Will Review
A.	C.	F.
B.	A.	F.
C.	A.	E.
D.	B.	E.
E.	B.	D.
F.	C.	D.

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*** There are sample reports posted on Blackboard - good examples for formatting.

April 11 th	In- Class Report Writing Session – Bring your peer reviews and copies of your own reports
April 18 th	In-Class Report Writing and Practice Presentations
April 25 th	Reports Due to Clients
April 25 th	Peer evaluations are due to instructor no later than 3PM. Final Written Report Due to Instructor - Each team must turn in a <i>hard</i> copy of the final report to the instructor.
May 2 – 6, 2011	ORAL PRESENTATIONS TO CLIENTS

Student may want to schedule a practice presentation with the instructor prior to the presentation to the client. Alternatively, the students can organize a practice session for one another.

Students must work with the client to schedule a time and date during this week that is agreeable to the client and all team members and must advise the instructor at least one week in advance of presentation date.

LESSONS FROM PRIOR CAPSTONE CLASSES

You will be required to submit notes/essays on “Lessons Learned” at the end of the Capstone Course. In general, students comments are focused on four related themes: 1) recognizing the need for professionalism in handling the project and interacting with the agency; 2) the importance of clearly defining the project and its tasks, and keeping the client informed of your progress; 3) applying good project management techniques; and 4) team building

- 1) Professionalism. There are several dimensions to this theme. First, prior students emphasized that the Capstone project is not like other class projects. Your group is, literally, doing the job of a consultant with a client. The project requires a large time commitment. Keeping on track and doing a good job also requires that students keep on top of the work throughout the semester and not wait until the end to pull everything together. Also, unlike class exams or papers, neither the client nor the instructor knows everything that should be included in the final report. Students will have to define for themselves what constitutes a good report that satisfies the client’s demands. Second, students should maintain a professional demeanor with their client, which means fulfilling the commitment and presenting a polished appearance (personally and in the report).
- 2) Defining the project and client feedback. The MOU and the Project Plan are important first steps in helping students determine exactly what the agency wants. Prior students emphasized the need to listen to the client carefully, and to provide interim reports to the client to obtain feedback. These interim reports act as a “reality check” on whether your group and the client are all “on the same page.” *There is a guide to writing the MOU and a template for the disclaimer on Blackboard in addition to MOU’s and project plans from past classes.*

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- 3) Project management. PM focuses identifying project components and how to insure that all components are completed on time so that the final product is timely and on target. Look to Blackboard for items from the Project Management Institute about some of the issues and techniques of project management.

- 4) Team building. Prior students talked about some of the techniques that helped them to handle group dynamics and manage the project within the group. Some of these techniques include defining what is expected of each group member (beyond the MOU) based upon their strengths (skills and knowledge they contribute to the project) and designating a leader or coordinator. *There is a link on Blackboard to a helpful site on team building that was provided by one of the prior students.*