

Academic Year Capstone Seminars

Fall Term 2017

The intent of the capstone seminar is to provide students with a focused experience in working on a real world problem of policy and management in a team setting under expert faculty guidance. Each seminar is focused on a prescriptive question - what should a specified public official or institution do about a specified problem?

Capstone Seminar: Poverty and Human Development

Prof. Müge Finkel

Thursday 9:00-11:50

The current impoverishment of more than 1.2 billion people presents the world with its greatest economic, social, political and moral challenge. Although progress and development, stirred by Millennium Development Goals and financed by multilateral and bilateral aid have had impressive impacts in some parts of the world, still large numbers of people live in chronic poverty, and increasing numbers of people feel trapped by ever growing layers of inequality.

Scholars of different disciplines continue to debate what has made poverty and inequality an outstanding issue for the 21st century but they are unanimous in their expectations of wide ranging consequences, including lagging technological innovation, economic stagnation, discontent over democratic values and increasing social unrest.

This capstone will introduce students to critical multidisciplinary scholarship into how poverty and inequality can be understood and measured, and how they can be addressed with effective policy interventions. It will utilize analytical frameworks from the fields of economics, political science and sociology to answer essential questions about wealth accumulation, prospects for economic growth and the evolution of inequality: *Is extreme poverty a thing of the past? What is economic life like when living under a dollar per day? Why do some countries grow fast and others fall further behind? Does growth help the poor? Are famines unavoidable? Should we leave economic development to the market? Does foreign aid help or hinder?*

The main writing requirement for the course, the policy paper, will build on sub-assignments that will be completed at scheduled times. Policy papers, being the main medium of writing in the policy world, differ from research papers in that they are shorter in length and prescriptive in nature. They aim to illuminate a particular issue and provide recommendations based on a balanced analysis of two or more policy options. The key components of a successful policy paper are: an interesting and timely issue or problem; an analytical overview of the background to the issue; a comparison of 2-3 different policy options derived from empirical cases; and a set of recommendations based on the analysis. An executive summary (generally written last) should precede the body of the paper.

Capstone Seminar: Policy and Planning in Developing Countries

Prof. Marcela Gonzalez Rivas

Friday 12:00-2:50p

This capstone course will be coordinated with a capstone course taking place in the University of Andes in Bogota, Colombia.

The core objective of this international capstone course is two-fold. The first is that the course gives students the experience of working on a "real life problem." Capstone courses give students the opportunity to apply their expertise and skills to addressing planning or policy problems, usually by working with a local organization, community organization or local government. This type of exercise is essential for students to translate the knowledge they have gained in their programs into practice. The second objective of the course is to explore the nexus between what happens at the local level and its pertinence globally. Therefore, in this Capstone course, students will work at the local level with Nine Mile Run Watershed Association (NMRWA), which is a small urban watershed located in Pittsburgh's East End. NMRWA works on

restoring and protecting its watershed ecosystem, while working regionally to support and implement solutions for an overall healthy urban environment.

Following the second objective, students in this capstone course will exchange ideas and information with the group of students in Colombia, who will be working with a local municipality near Bogotá, addressing environmental health challenges at the local level. In this sense, students enrolled in both capstones will be engaged locally on questions that are relevant elsewhere. The Colombian students will visit Pittsburgh in the Fall, to allow both groups of students to exchange their experiences working at the local level on related issues. In this sense, both groups of students will be working at the local level on issues that are relevant elsewhere in the world fostering the exchange of ideas and knowledge.

Context

NMRWA is responsible for the stewardship of the NMR Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration, which was completed in 2006. This includes activities in the upper watershed to improve water quality in NMR. Multi-municipal coordination is critical for any watershed organization, as the movement of water doesn't terminate at political boundaries. NMRWA has established programs and partnerships to remove pollutants, retain rainwater runoff, and engage residents with the goal of improving water quality in the stream. These efforts contribute to create an urban watershed ecosystem that helps address related community goals, such as job training, neighborhood revitalization, reduced flooding and basement backups, increased social equity, reduced heat island effects, enhanced community health, and home equity building. To provide support to the collaborative approach of NMRWA and its collective communities and neighborhoods, the Capstone course will offer a holistic, resilient, and sustainable assessment of possible solutions to the issues faced by their watershed.

Students in Colombia will be looking at the implications for Villapinzón's local government of a 2014 decree that established that by 2044 the Bogotá River must be free of pollutants, with short term implications. The Bogotá river starts in the Villapinzón municipality, and municipal officials are struggling with how to achieve this goal. The decree establishes general policy guidelines related to water and sanitation for local governments to follow, in order to restore the environment of the river. But the decision poses major challenges for local governments, since it implies not only the responsibility to achieve the goal but also to do so with little prior relevant knowledge. Therefore, students will continue working with the local government of Villapinzón to help the municipality comply with the decree and the short term goals.

More information on the course

Students interested in taking this course need to contact Prof. González Rivas mag231@pitt.edu; write in the email subject: "Capstone question".

Capstone Seminar: NGO Fundraising and Grant Writing Prof. Nuno Themudo Thursday 3:00-5:50p

The "NGO fundraising and grantwriting" capstone uses an innovative and holistic approach to the study of NGO funding by examining it from the complementary perspectives of fundraising, grant writing and grant making. By learning to think like parties in both sides – funding acquisition and grant making – students gain a greater confidence and capacity in the funding process. Moreover, NGOs increasingly act as the funders of other organizations so, aside from offering training in fundraising and grant writing, the course also seeks to develop grantmaking skills.

This course's aims are to help students reach proficiency in the skills needed for the funding of NGO projects both domestic and international. Through a realistic simulation, it gives students an opportunity for a "hands on" approach to seeking funding opportunities, mining donor databases, crafting grant applications to foundations and federal agencies, negotiating funding agreements, and managing the fundraising process.

Capstone Seminar: Intelligence Failures Prof. Phil Williams Wednesday 6:00-8:50p

When one looks at the history of United States foreign and security policies during the twentieth century and the early part of the twenty first century, it is hard not to be struck by the number of intelligence failures and foreign policy fiascos that have occurred. An enormous intelligence apparatus and decision makers who are often regarded as "the best and the brightest" have been prone to errors of commission and omission that have resulted in disastrous wars, botched military interventions, and inadequate or ineffective responses to challenges and threats. In addition, there are also what can broadly be termed technological or industrial disasters. Although some of these can be traced to poor regulation, it appears that certain kinds of organizational pathologies have also been at work. Indeed, there is a rich literature on disasters that provides some interesting comparisons with failures in intelligence and foreign and policy-making. This course is case study oriented and students will be expected to do a case study on intelligence, one on foreign policy fiascos, and one on disasters.