

Academic Year 2017 Capstone Seminars

Fall Term 2016

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 9:00a-11:50a

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: Practice in Urban and Regional Policy Development

Prof. David Miller

Monday 12:00p-2:50p

This capstone, restricted to 12 students, works with one or more governments in the Center for Metropolitan Studies network on an issue identified by that government. Past governments include the City of Pittsburgh's Department of Productivity and Innovation (city's role in encouraging residential solar power conversion, improving energy efficiency in municipally owned and operated buildings) and the Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT) (suburban poverty, residential solar power conversion, public transit hubs). Project selection is made by the class after presentations by a government. The class then designs a project proposal to the government including a set of deliverables. The recommendations are presented at the end of the semester.

Capstone Seminar: Financial Crises

Prof. Meredith Wilf

Tuesday 3:00p-5:50p

The Financial Crises capstone is a research-based capstone with dual objectives. At the end of the course, students will (1) be knowledgeable about domestic and international policy debates regarding the prevention and management of financial crises and (2) have developed an original, professional research report – with accompanying presentation – related to a policy aspect of financial crises.

Students engage in weekly discussions of political and economic aspects of crisis management and prevention across countries and across time. The course considers policy decisions that were causes or reactions to specific instances of crisis – from the 1990s Asian Financial Crisis to the 2008 Great Recession to the 2010 European sovereign debt crises – as well as the inherent policy tradeoffs that a country faces when it decides to raise or lower capital controls, to engage in austerity policies or to enter into an International Monetary Fund (IMF) program. Students are expected to be familiar with basic microeconomic and macroeconomic logics to analyze the validity and strength of proposed policy options.

The capstone project comprises two outputs – the written policy report and presentation – through which students exhibit proficiency in four distinct channels of communication with an audience: (1) a written text report, (2) original visuals that support the written text report, (3) presentation slides, and, (4) presentation delivery. Across all four communication channels, students strive to present complex information with depth, accuracy, and simplicity. The written report will have the objectivity, polish, and readability of a report published by the US General Accountability Office (GAO) or the US Congressional Research Service (CRS). To develop the best possible final product, each student will regularly present portions of his or her draft project to the class and engage in group feedback sessions. The course culminates in final, formal class presentations. Each student may complete the capstone project individually or within a small group.

Capstone Seminar: Gangs, Drug Traffickers, and Governance in Central America

Prof. Phil Williams

Wednesday 6:00p-8:50p

This capstone looks at the issue of governance and violence in the countries of Central America. The northern Triangle of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador is among the most violent areas in the world outside conflict zones – with *maras* (gangs) and drug trafficking organizations accounting for a significant part of the violence. Significantly, violence in Belize is also high. This capstone, which will adopt a comparative approach, seeks to explain why the levels of violence in the Northern Triangle have been much higher than in Nicaragua, Panama, and Costa Rica. Each person or team will be responsible for: (1) developing and updating a specific country profile that identifies, the main components and types of violence, the perpetrators of violence, the most violent and least violent areas in the country, and the best and worst policies and practices; (2) elucidating national and regional approaches that might be more successful in containing and reducing violence. Consideration will also be given to the role of the United States in the region, the extent to which this has reduced or exacerbated violence, and the changes in policy that might be required. The product will be a briefing and report to an intelligence and/or policy client.

Spring Term 2017

Capstone Seminar: Digital Governance and Planning in Pennsylvania **Prof. Sabina Deitrick**

Monday 9:00a-11:50a

This capstone seminar builds on two previous years of capstones that have focused on the needs and capabilities of Pennsylvania local governments embracing digital technologies and means to assist smaller communities. With results from last year's state survey, the Capstone class will build policy and planning recommendations on multiple strategies to improve digital governance for boroughs and townships in the state. The class will present its findings and recommendations to the Pennsylvania State Planning Board Working Group on Efficient Government at the end of the term. Recommendations will also be presented to the Pennsylvania Association of Township Supervisors and the Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs at their annual conferences in the spring. Students with interests in digital governance, applications to improve efficiency in government, and local government in general are encouraged to enroll.

Capstone Seminar: Program/Project Design and Evaluation: Workshop on Development **Prof. Müge Finkel**

Friday 9:00a-11:50a

The skills-based capstone course on Project Design is for students interested in working in international and local organizations, and who would like pursue careers in policy and program work in international and community development, human security and related areas. Students in this capstone will learn to formulate project proposals that are economically, socially, politically and environmentally viable, using methods that are widely practiced in major development agencies. We will teach and practice the foundations of project design step by step: identification of the main problem to be addressed, planning the project implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and to the final stage assessing the program's effectiveness. As such, the course will provide a venue in which students will be asked to develop a project idea on the basis of real needs and required resources, and then transpose the idea into an implementation plan and budget.

We will conduct the course in a workshop manner, so its success will depend on effective participation. Students are encouraged to bring project ideas developed during internships or in other settings, and to participate actively both as part of a project/program team and as individuals. We will bring practicing experts from organizations such as USAID and the World Bank as well as experts from within the University, to share their program development and evaluation experiences in their respective organizations.

Capstone Seminar: Nonprofit Clinic **Prof. Kevin Kearns**

Monday 3:00p-5:50p

The Nonprofit Clinic is a capstone seminar that gives you the opportunity to serve as a management consultant to a nonprofit organization in the Pittsburgh region. You will work in teams of two (2) people to provide professional-quality consultation to your nonprofit client, helping the client address issues related to strategic planning, market research, personnel management, fund raising, governance, leadership, and general management. In addition, you will learn about the consulting profession and you will practice many of the diagnostic, analytical, and interpersonal skills that are essential in a professional work environment.

The Nonprofit Clinic has served over 60 organizations in the past five years. Your predecessors in this course have set a high standard of quality work and professionalism. While there are no prerequisites for this course,

you will be quite challenged if you lack skills in problem diagnosis, organizational management and strategy, written and verbal communication, and team work.

At the end of this Capstone course you should be able to:

- Work with a nonprofit client to help them diagnose and define problems of management capacity building;
- Apply your skills in quantitative and qualitative analysis, organizational design, problem solving, team building, program evaluation, strategic thinking, and leadership to real organizational problems and opportunities;
- Design and manage a complex consulting project from beginning to end including: communication with the client, specification of products, terms of engagement, task and activity planning, project management, professional writing, and presentation skills;
- Practice skills in professional interaction, including professional etiquette, negotiation, conflict management, problem-solving and communication skills;
- Address professionally the unexpected issues that will arise in a consulting project;
- Build and sustain an effective team of professionals who will be engaged and mutually committed to delivering a professional-quality product to the client.

Capstone Seminar: Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism

Prof. Michael Kenney

Tuesday 12:00p-2:50p

This research-oriented capstone course will provide students the opportunity to apply what they have learned at GSPIA to deepen their understanding of terrorism and counter-terrorism. As a capstone seminar, students will work individually and in groups on a specific project they choose on terrorism and/or counter-terrorism.

The purpose of this capstone seminar is to give you a focused experience in working on a real world policy question: what should we do about terrorism, both in the United States and internationally? You will explore aspects of this larger puzzle that relate directly to your own interests. By the end of the semester you will have a greater understanding of the broad and complex nature of terrorism, much of which will come from learning about your colleagues' capstone projects, while also developing your own expertise on a specific policy-relevant question of interest to you.

This capstone course is built around students' research interests. We will spend the semester exploring topics in terrorism and counter-terrorism that interest you and your colleagues, topics that you are willing to investigate further through your own research. Working in small groups, students will make an oral presentation to the class at some point in the semester. They will also complete a written project related to their research.

Capstone Seminar: Data Visualization for Public Policy in R

Prof. Sera Linardi

Thursday 12:00p-2:50p

This is a skills-based capstone for students who have completed at least Quant I and would like learn to do data analysis in R while working with a nonprofit / governmental client. While STATA and other proprietary software are easy to learn, the open source R programming language is quickly becoming the leading language in data science and students are often finding R to be a prerequisite for analysis jobs. In this capstone you will spend about 3-5 hours a week outside of class on hands-on programming assignments to perform basic data manipulation and visualization in R. The emphasis will be to build a portfolio that demonstrate your

capabilities to future employers in analyzing and presenting data. Potential partners include the City of Pittsburgh Innovation and Performance Department and other local organizations.

Capstone Seminar: Genocide Prevention and Response

Prof. Taylor B. Seybolt

Monday 3:00p-5:50p

This seminar is concerned with stopping large-scale, systematic violence against civilians. Regular and irregular fighting forces commit atrocities against civilians with disturbing frequency, despite legal prohibitions and moral arguments against attacking non-combatants. The course is built around the proposition that genocidal acts are the result of processes of escalation that reach a threshold, beyond which a triggering event can turn normal violence into extreme violence. The first half of the course covers theories of the causes of genocide and mass atrocities, illustrated with cases from the early 1900s to the present. In the second half of the course, we evaluate efforts to prevent and respond to mass killing. In particular, we will look at early warning, planning and training programs put forward by various governmental and non-governmental bodies in the U.S. and at the UN

The course objectives are: (1) To become familiar with key concepts, issues and institutions in the field of mass atrocity prevention and response. (2) To understand the opportunities and constraints associated with planning and implementing prevention policies. (3) To carry out academic analysis of the processes that lead to extreme violence, with a focus on a specific crisis. (4) To research, write and present an analytical study of the protection of civilians in situations of potential genocidal violence. Past seminars have produced individual research papers, a group research report on Cote d'Ivoire, submitted to the Center for Genocide Prevention at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, and a group analytical report on the state of knowledge about protection of civilians, submitted to the Stimson Center program on the Future of Peace Operations.

Capstone Seminar: The Future of Economic Regionalism

Prof. Martin Staniland

Monday 12:00p-2:50p

This capstone will examine the political and economic rationale for the creation of the multiple schemes for regional economic integration and free trade areas proposed in the last fifty years. Many such schemes exist only on paper, and those still moving ahead are at very different levels of development, with the European Union (EU) being the most advanced in degree of integration and institutionalization. But the EU itself has recently suffered two major crises that have raised fundamental questions about the benefits, risks and potential of regional economic integration as a strategy.

After a survey of the main concepts and theories of regionalism, the course will move on to examine specific issues arising in the construction and implementation of schemes for regional economic integration in Asia and the Pacific region, Europe, Africa, North and Central America, South America, and the Middle East.

The class will then divide into teams. Each team will prepare a collective report on the progress and problems of regionalization in a specific region for presentation to the heads of state concerned.

The report will consist mainly of individually-authored chapters on such topics as specific aspects of and prospects for greater economic integration in the region concerned; evaluation of the main organization responsible for integration in the region; or an assessment of the progress made toward regional economic integration.

The report will conclude with a collectively-written set of recommendations for action by policy-makers at both regional and national levels in the region concerned.

Grades will be based on contributions to class discussions; evaluations of individual chapters and the related presentations to be given by students in each team toward the end of the semester; and a uniform grade for the collective recommendations and their presentation.

Capstone Seminar: NGO Fundraising and Grantwriting

Prof. Nuno Themudo

Tuesday 12:00p-3:00p

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.