SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA
PA 8990, CAPSTONE PROJECT:
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND URBAN STUDIES
Fall 2019

Course Instructor

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Course Description

The Capstone Project offers each student the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of the theory and practice of public administration and urban studies by applying the knowledge and skills gained in the MPA or Urban Studies program to a project of the student’s choice. This involves completing a project report reflecting the cumulative knowledge gained from these experiences. This class is intended only for students who are completing their Masters of Public Administration (MPA) or Master of Science in Urban Studies (MSUS). The prerequisite for this course is completion of 30 hours in the MPA or MSUS program and completion of core courses.

Course Objectives

• To demonstrate knowledge gained throughout the MPA and MSUS programs and to apply that knowledge to a relevant public management, nonprofit management, or policy problem.
• To produce a report that demonstrates critical thought, exhibits a level of analysis appropriate to a masters degree, and that displays a high level of professionalism and competence in presentation.
• To assess the effectiveness of the MPA and MSUS programs in achieving its mission, goals and objectives.

Possible Project Approaches

• Case study
• Action research
• Program evaluation
• Management analysis study
• Policy analysis study
• Work process analysis/process improvement
• Organizational analysis
• Strategic plan

Possible Project Techniques/Methodologies

• Surveys
• Content analysis
• Interviewing
• Cost/benefit analysis
• Focus groups
• Performance measurement
• Forecasting
• Observation
• Quantitative data analysis

Project Outline

Regardless of the project approach and methodology used, the final project should directly apply concepts drawn from MPA or MSUS course work, reading and practice that aid in understanding the political, social, economic, managerial other factors relevant to the context and issues of the project. The outcome should be improved understanding of professional practice in a public/non-profit organization or program. The project may also result in recommendations for action that could change an organization or program.

All materials will be posted on Canvas electronically in attached files readable by Word. Format will be Times New Roman 12 point font, single-spaced.

In addition to input and comment from the course instructor, peer review processes will be employed. Students will post their assignment on the appropriate Discussion Forum to receive input from peers as well as instructor.

Each student’s final product will be a report divided into seven sections as described below.

1. Executive Summary: Written when all other sections of the report are completed, this section provides the reader an overview of sections of the paper below.

2. Introduction: This section should by 1 to 2 pages long and address the following: Describes the issue studied including its development over time and the political and
organizational context (or other relevant context). This section describes the relevance or significance of the issue, problem, or project; presents a concise and clear statement of the research question, as well as the likely outcome(s) of not addressing the issue/problem. (Much of this section, of course, will be from your capstone proposal.)

3. Analytic Framework: This section should be 4 to 6 pages long, single-spaced, and address the following: Presents a full and balanced review of theoretical and practice-oriented concepts drawn from the appropriate scholarly and professional literature, comparing and contrasting different perspectives and analyzing their application to the research question. This section is often referred to as the “literature review.” The purpose of a review of previous research and various theoretical approaches to a topic is to develop an analytic framework that establishes the elements of the project, lays out the theoretical basis of the project, and integrates the project into the larger body of systematic knowledge about urban studies, public management and public policy. In other words, since you will be adding to our knowledge about a topic in your capstone, this section familiarizes the reader with “what we already know.” This section also provides the foundation for the development of a hypothesis, or a statement of what we expect this research to reveal.

4. Methodology: There is no one way right or wrong way to write a methodology section for a research paper, but in general, this section includes the Research Design, or a plan for answering the research question, as stated in your Introduction. The research question, of course, is what you want to find out; it is the core of your capstone research. The methodology section should provide an outline or description of that plan.

Several things are included in the methodology or research design section. For instance, what methodological approach are you taking? Are you using a qualitative approach, doing interviews, using case study methods, or observations? Or are you taking a quantitative approach, doing surveys, or using census data? Quantitative methods typically employ many more cases, or units of analysis. Are you using primary data that you have collected (eg. surveys)? Or are you using existing, secondary, data? You may also include your operational definitions here. This section describes how you intend to measure a concept you are studying. If you are doing a survey, you can include the survey instrument as an appendix. Tell us your source of data.

You need to tell the reader how you intend to collect, measure, and examine the information and data to answer the research question. Specifically, what is your method of data collection or research design? This data collection should be done systematically and logically. This is a critical part of social science research. Social science data or information is not a clear cut and precise as in the natural sciences, so this section is important to the credibility and validity of the research.

One way to provide a transition from the literature review (or analytic framework) to the methodology is to include a hypothesis. The hypothesis is a prediction, based on what you already know about a topic, of what you will find when you collect and examine the
data. Then you can tell the reader how you intend or did collect the data to “test” your hypothesis and help answer the question you posed at the very beginning of the study.

This description of the data collection methods may vary in length from 3 to 5 pages, single-spaced. Often people will draw on research methods books to clarify their methodology or justify its validity. The syllabus contains several basic research books. You can write this section is the past tense (eg. the work is done) or in the future tense (the work is yet to be done.)

5. Findings: In general, in this section of your capstone paper you describe and summarize the findings from your data collection. Your data or information, naturally, has already been gathered, compiled, sorted, and analyzed. In this section, then, you should discuss your findings in terms of the research question posed at the beginning of the research process. It is a good idea to remind the reader what your research question is at the beginning of this section. Your examination of the data, of course, will incorporate your analytical framework. For instance, discuss from the Analytical Framework, what we know and then add to the discussion what you found out in your research. Also, if appropriate, you can examine and compare your findings in terms of any hypotheses you may have formulated (expectations based on the literature review). Include graphics and visuals in this section, including tables, charts, diagrams, photographs, maps, and figures. Discuss and describe the results of your research as objectively as you can. (The application of your research findings, however, like the identification of best practices, suggestions for program modifications, implications, or policy recommendations, will probably be more appropriate in the next section of your capstone paper: Conclusions, and Implications.) The text in this section (not including graphics) should be at a minimum 2 to 5 pages in length, single-spaced.

6. Conclusion: There are several items that can be part of your Conclusion. These include but are not limited to discussions of:

- Potential impact of your findings on the practice of public administration, or urban studies.
- Implications of your research on core theories or concepts of public administration, urban studies, public policy, or public affairs.
- How your research affects existing knowledge and research in the area, (of course, this will be driven if you have developed a hypothesis.)
- Application of your findings to a public sector or not-for-profit organization, agency, or program.
- Recommendations for policy, program, or organizational changes.
- The impact on “Best” administrative practices
- Relationship of your findings to the analytic framework, literature review, and hypotheses.
- Areas for future research in public policy, public administration, and urban studies.

In particular, remember that since you are in an urban studies program, it is very important that you include in this section a focused discussion of the implications of your research to the general field of urban studies. This can include a set of recommendations
for improving the practice of public policy or some aspect of improving the urban environment. Of course, you will likely focus on administrative issues that are related to your research topic or field. It is this section where you can be very creative and innovative; expanding the scope of your research. The Conclusion section should be at a minimum 2 to 4 pages, single spaced, in length.

7. References: A complete and accurate list of references must be included, in the style of the American Psychological Association Publication Manual, the most current edition. A departure from the style guide will be that all tables, figures and graphics should be included in the body of the report as close as possible to the text discussion of the item. Appendices may be used to include lengthy and detailed material not directly discussed in the body of the report. This might include material such as transcripts of in-depth interviews, frequency distributions of survey items, and special computations related to the project (e.g., details of a benefit/cost analysis).

Note: Wikopedia and other dictionaries are not an acceptable source of information for the capstone project.

Evaluation

The class will be graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis. Each student will complete a written report of their project and will make an oral presentation of the project to other members of the Capstone course, and alumni “judges.” Timely completion of each assignment according to the course schedule listed below is required for the student to continue on to the next phase of the project. Students who fall behind in the course or whose work is not deemed to be sufficiently completed at each stage may be asked to withdraw at the professor’s discretion. Students who are unable to complete their project, but have been both timely and maintained good-faith efforts to complete each phase of their project, may be approved by the professor to receive a grade of “IP” (in progress) at the end of the semester. This grade requires professor approval.

NOTE: Projects involving the collection of data may need to be conducted on a more aggressive timeline. For example, the analytic framework and methodology may need to be completed more quickly, thus allowing more time for data collection, preparation, and analysis. Consult with the professor early on.

Course Procedures and Expectations

Each student will work independently, and since the project is intended to represent the culmination of the student’s work in the MSUS and MPA programs, each student will be responsible for designing and conducting all aspects of the project.

During the semester the professor will be available as a coach, mentor, and resource person. In particular, the professor will review a written draft of each principal section of the student’s report and provide detailed comments and suggestions to the student. Once the professor reviews a given draft section of the report, the student should use the
comments and suggestions in the development and preparation of the final report. The professor will generally not review and comment on a student’s revision of a given section; it is the student’s responsibility to make appropriate revisions and to integrate each section into a final written report.

The student is expected to conduct research that meets professional standards for quality and validity. The final report is expected to meet professional standards for writing and style. Students should use the Writing Guide provided with the syllabus in addition to other materials to assist with writing. The oral report may be presented using or software such as PowerPoint and will not exceed 15 minutes in length.

Because of the independent nature of the capstone project, much communication between students and the professor will be via e-mail or telephone. Draft sections for review must be posted on Canvas by the dates indicated on the course schedule. In addition to suggestions by the instructors, students will receive input from others in the class. Students may also discuss their project in a telephone call with the professor or may arrange an appointment at a mutually convenient time.

**Course Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Activity /Assignment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 8</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION Post on Canvas the “Introduction” section of the project, as specified on page 2 of the syllabus. Length should be 1-2 single-space pages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 29</td>
<td>ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK Post on Canvas the “Analytic Framework” section of the project. See page 2 of the syllabus for requirements of the framework. Length should be 4-6 single-space pages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 20</td>
<td>METHODOLOGY Post on Canvas a clear, detailed statement of the project’s hypothesis(es) or research question(s) as developed from the analytic framework; describe the research approach, design, or strategy to be used, the type of data to be collected (that will allow for the test of the hypotheses or will answer the research questions), the sampling procedures, if used, and the methods of data collection. Length should be 3-5 single-space pages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 10</td>
<td>FINDINGS Post on Canvas a draft of the research results. Length will vary depending on use of tables and figures; text alone should be 2-5 single-space pages.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 24</td>
<td><strong>CONCLUSIONS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Post on Canvas a discussion of the project’s findings or results as related to the analytic framework, and present implications and recommendations. Length should be 1-3 single-space pages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 4</td>
<td><strong>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</strong>&lt;br&gt;Post on Canvas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 5</td>
<td><strong>PRESENTATIONS</strong>: 1 to 5 pm. Location to be determined. Specific guidance on presentations will be provided. Post your Powerpoint Presentation on Canvas prior to presentation. Distance students will present via conference call.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 20</td>
<td>Final Report must be posted on Canvas by end of day, the last day of the fall semester.</td>
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Writing Guide

Problem areas
- Generally, avoid first-person narrative and familiar, “we” or “you” language, such as “now that we understand ethics,” or “how do you understand ethics?”
- Avoid contractions.
- Note that “it’s” means only “it is,” and is not used for any other meaning.
- Punctuation.
  - Period and comma always appear before quotation marks, except when a parenthetical citation ends the sentence; then, the period is outside the citation.
  - Question mark, colon, semi-colon appear outside quotation marks (though a question mark appears inside the quotation mark if it applies to the quote, not the full sentence).
  - Quotation marks are double, not single, except for a quote within a quote.
- Quotations 40 or more words in length appear in block format. There are no quotation marks in block quotations except for quotes within the quote. The final period appears at the end of text, not outside a parenthetical citation.
- Avoid sentence fragments. Sentences must have a subject (noun clause) and predicate (verb clause) [predicate: proclaim, preach]. Example: “The governing body should create agency mission and goals statements. Also ensure that they are implemented” (no subject).
To correct, delete period, change “Also” to “and.”
- Avoid use of “individual” in place of “person,” “people,” “citizen,” “woman,” etc. Use individual only to emphasize separation from a group.
- Avoid exaggerated language such as “extremely,” “very,” or “enormous,” unless the circumstances described are in fact quite different from others.
- Avoid absolute or normative language such as “must,” “should,” “necessary,” or “required,” unless paraphrasing others or presenting a strongly supported argument involving no, or demonstrably undesirable, alternatives.
- Avoid re-creating lists from the work of others. They are usually a waste of space; briefly summarize their content in narrative form.
- In general, do not use dictionary definitions. Develop description and definitions from course-related source materials.
- Do not anthropomorphize. For example: “The welfare program believed that…” Programs cannot “believe”; employees in the program may do so.
- Miscellaneous items of spelling and word usage:
  - affect = verb, to influence or noun, emotion; effect = verb, to bring about or noun, a result or impact
  - ies/y's (agency's, possessive; agencies, plural)
- moot (lacking practical significance)/mute (unable to speak)
- populace (people living in an area)/populous (many people in an area)
- principle (idea)/principal (first, primary)
- separation/seperation (second e is incorrect)
- tenet (principle)/tenant (occupant in building)
- there (location)/their (plural possessive)

- Avoid pointless, redundant words that do not contribute to meaning. Examples (there are valid uses for these, but usually they are pointless and redundant):
  - “in order”
  - “in which”
  - “does,” as in, “the author does present evidence for….”
- Avoid colloquialism, instead writing exactly what is meant in plain, clear language.
  - “goes on to say” (referring to additional thoughts from the same author; alternatives include simply quoting what the author writes, or use phrases such as: _____ also writes that, “….”)  
  - “looks at” (alternatives: “examines,” “explores,” “discusses”)
  - “the cards are on the table”
  - “sticks out in my mind” (alternative: “seems important”)
  - “sat down to a meeting” (alternative: “met”)
  - “what is the next step?” (referring to preferred next concepts addressed in a paper, or actions to be taken by academicians or practitioners)
  - “take a hold of”
  - “come up with” (alternatives: “create,” “produce,” “build,” etc.)
  - “the author talks about” or “says” (alternatives: “writes about,” “states,” “argues”)

- Do not overuse quotation, which should be a small percentage of the text of a paper. Quotations should be explained and interpreted in surrounding text.
- The best written work is much like speech. Envision presenting your paper before an audience, for example a class, making good eye contact, speaking clearly, and giving emphasis where appropriate. Read your written work aloud, then make changes when you hear language that is awkward, unclear, confusing. Do the sentences as written flow well and make sense? Is each paragraph a complete thought composed of related sentences? Is the work interesting and its meaning clear?
- Never under any circumstances discuss, paraphrase or quote the work of others without giving proper and thorough attribution (parenthetical citations and reference-list entries), and placing
quotation marks around all direct quotations. Failure to properly attribute is plagiarism. The sanction can be failure for the assignment and possibly failure of the course and removal from the program.

**APA**
- Attribution: give in-text references when using ideas of others or quoting. All direct quotation is in quotation marks with page citation.
- For this course, show page number(s) in parenthetical references unless referring to entire work (APA sec. 3.39, p. 121; and 3.101, pp. 213-214). Page #s indicated by “p.” for one page, “pp.” for two or more.
- Reference list style: capitals are used in book and article titles only for first word, proper names, first word in sub-title following colon.
- Titles in text: first letter of each word of book titles capitalized, title in italics; article titles also in caps, quotation marks, no italics.
- Page numbers in the 5th edition of the APA Manual for guidance on commonly used items:
  - parenthetic in-text citations, pages 207+
  - reference list entries for journal articles, pages 239+
  - ref. list, books, pages 248+
  - ref. list, electronic sources, pages 120 and 268+
  - block quotations, pages 117-118
- In APA, journal issue # is not given if the volume is numbered continuously.
- See APA for block quotation format, use of italics, ellipsis points, etc.

**Editing**
- “etc. below” indicating application of the correction note to later instances.
- Editing marks for letter or word reversal (curving line on top of one and under the other), delete item (circle around item, with tail), no caps (three lines above letter, top longest, bottom shortest).