

MPP Capstone Orientation Session October 10, 2014

Trachtenberg School
of Public Policy
& Public Administration

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

MPP Capstone Instructors:

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Team Assembly

- Teams consist of four members (proven to be the ideal number for balanced responsibilities, effective communications, and ambitious but manageable projects)
- All four members must be enrolled in the same evening section in order to have regular team meetings with the instructor, research advisor, and team members.
- Previous teams advise: Do not make personal friendships a major factor in team formation; shared topic interests and professional relationship are more important.
- It can also be helpful to have at least one team member who has the experience of working on a previous course project with an external client.
- Allowing teams to self-assemble based on shared interests works well, although capstone instructors must still make the final selection among nominated team members in order to everyone has a group.
- Those whose preferred topic is more narrow or less common may not be able to find a perfect team match, so flexibility is of course necessary.
- We will email a spreadsheet of names, interests, and emails to facilitate team assembly no later than October 17. Info will be posted at: tinyurl.com/spring6019

Timetable

- ASAP: Answer the six questions at tinyurl.com/gwu6019 no later than October 14.
- Mid-October: Begin conversations about mutual interest and possible teams.
- Late October: Spring registration opens November 10. The spring schedule should be online by October 27 and possibly as early as October 20. As soon as feasible, decide which capstone section best fits your schedule so you can begin to confirm a suitable team of four people in the same section.
- Late October/early November: Notify both Bill (adams@gwu.edu) and Leah (lfbrooks@gwu.edu) if and when you have probable teams put together.
- November 14 (6-7pm) capstone launch (MPA 309): Finalize teams, discuss client recruitment, obtaining CITI ethics certification, distribute syllabus.
- December 4: If possible, attend presentations of the fall (MPA/MPP) capstone.

Client Considerations

- GW is the envy of policy program across the country because of our amazing range of nearby capstone client options!
- While it is premature to go after clients at this stage, a few considerations to keep in mind regarding client recruitment in a few weeks:
 - Advocacy groups can be awkward clients if they want spin to overpower objective analysis.
 - Some clients can be terribly slow in turnaround time and getting approval on everything from up the chain of command. The problem is not confined to government and places like DCPS so it is important at the outset to try to get an idea of how responsive a potential client is likely to be.
 - The client cannot currently employ you or a significant other.
 - It is OK and usually wonderful if a TSPPPA alumnus – who thus understands the importance of rapid responses and knows the impressive caliber of the research – is a key decision maker or liaison at the organization.
- In November, we will email you materials and suggested text for contacting prospective clients.
- Clients may have an interest in research products that are different from those required for your course. You should work with your professors/advisors to negotiate appropriate client expectations.

Project Considerations

- The capstone project should exploit methodologies and research approaches you have studied in your MPP program at GW.
- Ideally, the project should entail at least some primary data collection. You can analyze an existing data set as part of your project, but you should also collect original data through a survey or interviews. This may influence the type of client you choose and how you pitch your potential research.
- Be cautious about vulnerable populations (such as teen parents, children, homeless, or incarcerated individuals). While most projects do not require a detailed IRB review, projects with vulnerable populations do take a nontrivial amount of time for formal GW IRB clearance.