

**PUBP&A 610: Capstone Seminar in Public Policy and Administration
Spring 2011**

Instructors:	Kathryn McDermott	Joya Misra
Office:	258 Hills South & Gordon 117	Machmer W33E
Phone:	545-3562	545-5969
Office Hours:	Tues 10 AM-noon when class doesn't meet (in Gordon) & by appointment (in Hills)	Tues 10 AM-noon when class doesn't meet & by appt.
Email:	mcdermott@educ.umass.edu	misra@soc.umass.edu

The major purpose of the Capstone Seminar is for you to reflect upon and synthesize what you have learned in the MPPA program by writing a paper that identifies and addresses an important gap in knowledge about a particular issue in public policy or management. Some of you will do this through a project that has a client, while others of you will be working on non-client-based research projects.

You need to begin with a research question – this question should have more than one possible answer, and you should need to have to do research in order to answer the question. Your question should be framed fairly narrowly, rather than being very broad. You should keep in mind that this project needs to be doable in the context of one semester (a semester in which you are taking other courses and likely looking for jobs). You may answer the question with qualitative data (such as interviews or observations), with analyses of texts (such as written materials), with quantitative data (such as existing datasets or your own survey), or with a mixed methods approach. You should apply to your problem the various conceptual and analytical approaches you have learned in your coursework, although each of you will not necessarily use all of the forms of analysis.

This course also gives you experience in giving and receiving feedback on work in progress. Over the course of the semester, you will be turning in weekly progress reports, as well as an outline, a rough draft, and the final draft of the capstone. You will receive feedback on this work from your classmates and the instructors and will provide feedback to your classmates.

At the end of the semester, you will present your findings as both an oral presentation and a written paper. Each of you will also be responsible for commenting briefly on one other class member's paper. The paper will be due **May 3**; the Capstone Conference, to which the entire CPPA community is invited, will be held **May 4 & 5**. The conference will not use all of both those days, but for now please plan to keep them free for the conference until we refine the plan more.

Course Requirements:

- (1) Initial Memo. Due in class on **January 18**. This memo should describe your topic and your research strategy, and should identify at least one U Mass faculty member who could serve as a faculty advisor. (5% of final grade)
- (2) Weekly Progress Reports & Individual Meetings. You will keep the instructors updated on your capstone project through weekly progress reports that include both successes and frustrations. You should also schedule at least two meetings with the instructor assigned to you (weeks of **February 22 and March 22**). Progress reports and meetings are not graded, although you lose these points if you do not turn them in/schedule meetings. You

- must post progress reports to *the SPARK website*. Click on the discussion icon, and then enter your progress report in the private discussion with your name. (5% of final grade)
- (3) Research Plan. The research plan describes your research question, describes the data you need to answer your research question, and how you plan to collect this data. It also provides a timeline for your project. The research plan is due **February 8**. (5% of final grade)
 - (4) Rough Draft. You will turn in a rough draft of the final paper that comes as close as possible to a final product. The rough draft is not graded, although you lose these points if you do not turn it in on time or do not make a good-faith effort. The rough draft is due **March 29**. (5% of final grade)
 - (5) Peer Feedback. Over the course of the semester, you will provide feedback on one colleague's outline/research plan **by February 11** and rough draft by **April 5**, and serve as discussant for that person's presentation at the capstone conference. (10% of final grade)
 - (6) Final Draft. The final draft is the complete and polished version of the capstone paper. It is due on **May 3**. (60% of final grade)
 - (7) Presentation. At the capstone conference, you present the main questions and findings for your project. The conference is held on **May 4 & 5**. (10% of final grade)

Course Website

All students are required to use the SPARK website for this course. The website includes a copy of the syllabus and other useful materials. You will make your progress reports over the course website (through a private discussion board). There will also be a discussion open between the instructors, your research partner, and yourself, where you can post your research plan, rough draft, and feedback for your partners. You will be able to gain access to the website after the semester begins. Your Net ID will be your Login ID for SPARK; your password will be your password. The link for the course is here:

<https://spark.oit.umass.edu/webct/entryPageIns.dowebct>

Course Schedule

January 11	Email a preliminary title and 3-sentence description of your capstone to Katie McDermott mcdermott@educ.umass.edu and Joya Misra misra@soc.umass.edu .
January 18	Class meeting; bring to class two copies of a memo describing the topic, and your expected research strategy and data sources. On the memo, list the name of at least one faculty member at UMass-Amherst who could serve as a faculty advisor.
January 25	Post progress report on SPARK.
February 1	Post progress report on SPARK.
February 8	Post progress report on SPARK, including research plan; provide feedback to research partner by February 11.
February 14	Post revised research plan on SPARK by February 14, 9 am.

February 15	No progress report this week. Class meeting to go over research plan: 9:30-10:30 for students doing qualitative projects; 10:30-11:30 for students doing quantitative projects (if you use mixed methods, plan to attend both sessions).
February 22	Monday schedule - schedule individual meetings for this week Post progress report on SPARK.
March 1	Post progress report on SPARK.
March 8	Class meeting to discuss rough drafts; Post progress report on SPARK.
March 22	Post progress report on SPARK - schedule individual meetings for this week
March 29	Rough Draft Due on SPARK; no progress report this week.
April 5	Provide comments to research partner on SPARK – individual meetings encouraged; no progress report this week.
April 12	Post progress report on SPARK detailing revision plan based on feedback from instructors and research partner. This is the last progress report.
April 26	Class meeting to discuss Capstone Conference and presentations; individual meetings required this week or next. Meet with research partners to practice presentations.
May 3	Final capstone paper due on SPARK.
May 4 & 5	Capstone Conference

Questions about the Capstone Course

What is the capstone? Is it a master's thesis?

The capstone project is a paper and presentation that addresses an important question about a policy or management issue. The capstone allows you to synthesize the conceptual and analytical tools that you have learned over the course of the MPPA program. However, the capstone is not a master's thesis, as in most cases it reflects only one semester's work on the project. At the end of the semester, you present your findings in both an oral presentation and a **20-25 page** written paper.

What is the role of the capstone professors?

The capstone professors' role is to provide general guidance to you as you develop your capstone projects and to evaluate the project. This includes discussing topic development and research strategy, reviewing drafts, arranging for the final presentation, ensuring that the project is completed in a timely manner, and grading your project and work over the course of the

semester. We will be dividing the class into two groups, with one of the professors taking primary responsibility for the students in each half of the group. Both of us will be using the same rubrics to evaluate your work, and we will both be involved in grading your final papers.

What is the role of the faculty advisor for my project? Do I have to have one?

We *strongly encourage* you to work with a faculty advisor with substantive knowledge in the area of your capstone project. Advisors provide guidance specific to their areas of expertise whereas the capstone professor provides general guidance on the project. You may choose any faculty member at the university who has the expertise required by the project. Questions appropriate for the advisor include: topic development, literature review, and methodology (e.g., survey design). Your faculty advisor is not expected to make written comments on your work (though s/he may, at his/her own discretion) or grade you; these are responsibilities of the Capstone Professors. It is in your best interest to have a faculty advisor.

What is an appropriate capstone topic? How should I choose a topic?

You can choose any topic area relevant for policy or administration for your capstone. Your Capstone project should identify and address an important question about a particular problem or issue in public policy or management. You may draw your capstone project from questions you've considered in previous courses, other questions that you are concerned about, or from a project you worked on during your internship, in the workshop class, or in some other setting. While some students work on client-based project, others do not. Whether you work for a client or not, however, *you will have to make sure that your capstone project centers around a research question that you can answer through empirical research.*

There are three things to keep in mind in choosing a topic. First, you should focus on something that is interesting to you. If you are interested in welfare reform, don't do a capstone on whether Bunsen burners should be allowed in public camps, even if you think the Bunsen burner question would be easier to research. Second, you should focus your project as much as possible – do not ask “how has welfare reform impacted the poor?” Instead, narrow your question to something doable, such as “how do different levels of education affect the wages of welfare leavers in Massachusetts?” Finally, narrow your question to something that is doable in terms of the data to which you can gain access. While you may not be able to get data on all of the poor, you may be able, for example, to tap into a particular data set on welfare leavers in Massachusetts. Therefore, choosing a topic requires a certain amount of research to determine what is feasible. We encourage you to look through some examples of past capstone projects, which are available in CPPA. As you will see, these are quite varied, and we expect the same will be true for this year's capstones.

Why doesn't the course meet regularly? Why does it meet when it does? Why do I need to have individual appointments some weeks?

We want this course to allow you to focus on your capstone research. Rather than assigning readings and spending time meeting *every* week, we hope that you allocate these hours each week to making progress on your capstone. However, we do meet several times during the semester. We meet January 18th to address administrative issues and discuss topics and writing and research strategies. We will meet February 15th to discuss your outline and research plan. Finally, we will meet on March 8th for a discussion of rough-draft expectations and April 26th to discuss the capstone conference and do other end-of-semester housekeeping.

Throughout the semester, you will also be meeting with one of us in individual meetings. These meetings allow you to “check in” with us, discuss your progress in more detail than the weekly progress reports allow, and ask us questions about your project or the process. You will meet with us during the weeks of February 22nd and March 22nd to discuss your progress. We also strongly encourage you to meet with us during the week of April 5th to go over your rough draft. We welcome additional meetings with you, and hope that you take advantage of our office hours (listed on the first page of the syllabus).

What should I talk about in my weekly progress reports? How will they be graded? When are they due?

Briefly describe what progress you’ve made during the week. If you haven’t made any progress, explain why (busy week in another course, personal crisis, lack of data, writer’s block, etc.). The points (5% of final grade) for progress reports are a freebie - we don’t grade the content of these reports, and only take off points if you don’t turn them in. This is because if you don’t write progress reports we will be less able to help you through whatever difficulties you have with the paper. The dates that these reports are due are listed in the course schedule above. Post your weekly report to SPARK (in your private “progress report” discussion board) by 9:00 am on the date that they are due.

What is peer feedback? How will it be graded?

In addition to working on your own project, you will also give feedback to classmates. This is an important process; it develops a number of skills for you both as the provider and recipient of critique. In giving peer feedback, you should provide thoughtful and constructive comments about both the strengths and weaknesses of the project. We will assign research partners to you after the first class meeting.

You will give feedback three times during the semester. By February 11th, you will give feedback on your partner’s research plan. You will also be responsible for reading and commenting on your research partner’s rough draft, using a rubric that we provide. The feedback on your classmate’s rough draft will be due on April 5. Finally, you will serve as the discussant for a classmate’s capstone presentation at the Capstone Conference. You will have 2 minutes to raise questions and make constructive comments about the presentation and paper.

The points (10% of final grade) for peer feedback are assigned based on your timely and meaningful participation in these processes. If you take your role in providing your classmates with feedback seriously, you will receive full credit.

What is the Research Plan? How will it be graded?

The Research Plan should contain:

- 1) A research question, narrowly focused, and that can be answered with empirical data
- 2) A plan that describes (a list of bullet points is fine) what data you need, what data you already have, and how you plan to obtain the remaining data in time to write the paper
- 3) A preliminary bibliography (using JPAM format) for the paper

The points (5% of final grade) for the Research Plan are based on how carefully you meet the requirements of the assignment listed above, as well as the rubric associated with the

assignment. You are able to revise your research plan, based on feedback from your partner and the instructor assigned to you. *The Research Plan is due by 9 am on February 8th; the revised Research Plan is due by 9 am February 14th.*

What is a Rough Draft? How will it be graded?

A Rough Draft is a paper—not an outline—that comes as close as possible to a final product. The more finished a product the draft is, the more useful feedback you will receive both from us and from your classmates. The draft is due relatively early in the semester because revision is a major part of writing a major research paper. Nobody ever gets a long paper right on the first try, and we want you to have as much time as possible to get subsequent drafts as polished as possible.

The points (5% of final grade) for the rough draft are a freebie - we don't grade the content of these reports, and only take off points if you don't turn them in on time. This helps you get the rough draft off your desk. *The Rough Draft is due by 9 am on March 29th.* You will post these on SPARK. We plan to return the draft to you with comments no later than April 5th. You will also need to provide feedback and expect to receive feedback from your research partner by April 5th.

We will distribute a rubric for the final paper to the class at least a month before the Rough Draft is due. We will use the rubric to guide our feedback to you on the Rough Draft, and you should also use it in your peer evaluations.

How do I turn in the final paper? How long should it be? How will it be graded?

The final paper is due by 9 am on May 3rd. You will submit a copy on SPARK – and provide an **UNBOUND** hard copy to CPPA for inclusion in the CPPA Library. While paper length may vary, we expect the capstone paper to be approximately 20-25 pages in length. We grade the capstones on the basis of the criteria in the rubric we will distribute before you write your Rough Drafts.

The difference between an “A” and “B” paper is often the amount of revision you put in, so revise, revise, revise!

What happens at the Capstone Conference? How are the presentations graded?

The capstone will take place on **May 4 & 5**. You will need to plan to attend the entire capstone conference, to learn from and provide support for your classmates. You will present your main research question and findings to an audience made up of other class members, other CPPA students and faculty, the larger university community, and anybody else you choose to invite.

Each paper will be given 20 minutes. You will each have 10-12 minutes to make your presentation. Then, your discussant will take no more than 3 minutes to comment on your paper and pose a question or two for discussion. During the remaining 5 minutes of your time, you can respond to the discussant's question and audience members will also ask questions. We grade the capstone presentations on the basis of the following criteria, although we will also distribute a rubric:

- Is the research question clear?

- Does the presentation carefully describe the findings (mentioning data sources where necessary), and explain the implications of these findings?
- Is the presentation well-organized, with appropriate pacing?
- Is the material communicated in an interesting and effective manner?
- Does the presenter respond constructively and knowledgeably to questions?

Academic Honesty

All students should be familiar with the information in the document “Academic Honesty”, located on the web at:

http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/downloads/AcademicHonestyPolicy.pdf. Any student who violates these rules will not receive a passing grade for this class, or graduate from the program.

One thing that you should be very cautious about is drawing from the work of others, whether citing their work, quoting, or paraphrasing. Including any material word for word (or with only very minor changes) is plagiarism if you do not make it clear that you are quoting from the source material, even if you reference that material. The Center has a strict plagiarism policy, which we will implement:

Representing the words or ideas of another as one's own work in any academic exercise is plagiarism, one of the most serious forms of academic dishonesty. This includes submitting without citation, in whole or in part, the research of another. Students are responsible for complying with the University of Massachusetts plagiarism policy. The University of Massachusetts policy and other information on plagiarism are included in the CPPA student handbook. Cases of plagiarism may be referred to official University of Massachusetts channels.

We will spend more time discussing these issues in class. You may also want to look at the following document for additional guidelines:

<http://www.umass.edu/cie/Themes/APARules-3rd%20ed.pdf>

Turnitin.com: We will submit all of your rough drafts and final papers to the Turnitin.com database, which compares the text to existing sources available on the Internet. The database generates an “originality report,” which identifies the proportion of the text that is exactly identical to these other sources. A high proportion of verbatim material from other sources does not prove that you committed plagiarism (for example, a long quote from a source, properly enclosed in quotation marks and cited appropriately, will still come up as “non-original material”) but it does alert us to areas that may be problematic.

Once we have submitted a paper to Turnitin, it becomes part of the UMass Amherst dedicated database of assignments at Turnitin. However, it cannot be accessed without our permission. We will not give this permission without asking you. (In four years using the database, nobody has yet asked for permission to see a paper.) These databases of assignments will be used solely for the purpose of detecting possible plagiarism during the grading process during this term and in the future. Under University of Massachusetts policy, you can opt not to have your paper submitted electronically to Turnitin. However, if you opt out of Turnitin, you must submit copies of the cover page and first cited page of each source listed in the bibliography with the draft and final paper in order to receive a grade on the assignment.