

PLS 595: Capstone Seminar in Public Administration

Spring 2009

Instructor: Tom Barth, Ph.D.

Class Hours: Monday 6:30 – 9:15 p.m. LH 111

Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday: 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.

Monday: 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. or by appointment (recommended)
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Course Description

This course integrates knowledge from the curriculum and uses this core knowledge to complete an applied research project that demonstrates mastery of key concepts, methods, and skills in the MPA program. Public Administration as a profession and career are discussed and students develop a career plan for their future. The theme of ethics will be discussed as well as an example of an aspect of public management that should be at the foundation of all that one does as a professional public administrator.

The Meaning of Capstone

In the past and in other countries, the Capstone means the highest point of achievement in your professional training. Many programs still require a Master's Thesis but our program requires an applied research project that illustrates the ability of the student to integrate knowledge from across the curriculum. An outline for the applied research project is attached to the syllabus so students can begin work on the project early in the semester.

Course Objectives

- To integrate core knowledge across the MPA curriculum
- To discuss ethics as a critical foundational theme for practice
- To develop a career strategy and a professional portfolio
- To complete an applied research project that integrates materials from the curriculum, internship and/or practicum
- To sharpen oral competency by making a series of professional presentations

Required Book

Cooper, Terry (2006). The Responsible Administrator. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.

Class Grade

Class Assignments and Participation (30%)

- Must attend class to max participation grade (one absence allowed)
- Assignments graded on timeliness and professional quality
- Prepared for class and able to respond to questions and participate in discussions

Career Plan, Portfolio, and Presentation (20%)

- Complete a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Instrument
- Complete a Career Anchors Inventory
- Complete a professional portfolio with cover letter, resume, and sample work
- Develop and present a career strategy to class using power point and include feedback from a mentor in the community

Applied Research Project (50%)

- Please see attachment: "Outline for Applied Research Project"
- Guidance for Applied Research Projects: Students may work individually or as a group. It is your choice. However, remember in team projects the distinct contribution of each member must be documented so that individual evaluations can be conducted. Peer evaluations will also be utilized (see attached form). Each student on the team will receive the grade the overall project receives unless peer feedback suggests unsatisfactory contributions to the effort.
- Students will be expected to be working on their projects from the beginning of the semester. The class schedule shows various deadlines for steps in project development that must be followed. Students should be prepared for a dry run of their project presentations on April 13. Formal class presentations will be held on April 20 in front of MPA faculty. The top three presentations will be selected for presentation on April 28 to the entire MPA student body and invited members from the community such as the MPA Community Advisory Board. However, all projects will be presented in poster format on that evening as well. A sample poster format is attached.

Note that where feasible the instructor will identify a practitioner from the community to act as an advisor to the project. As a guideline, each project should consult with their practitioner at least three times during the semester: near the beginning as the project is

being formulated, at the midpoint of the semester to ensure that the project is on the right track, and during the dry run phase for final advice on the presentation.

Class Assignments and Schedule:

January 12

Goals of the course

Tentative discussion of possible career goals and projects

Important professional organizations in Public Administration: ASPA, SECOPA, APPAM, ARNOVA or organizations from your concentration

Importance of Theory in Public Administration

January 19 – Martin Luther King Holiday – No Class

January 26

Integrating ethics in overall management/leadership style

Finalizing project teams and topics

Assignments: Read Cooper, Chapters 1-5. Identify three of the most critical themes, theories or set of practice principles that you think will influence your management/leadership style in the future. Put the information on a power point presentation. Also turn in a hard copy to the Instructor.

In one page indicate the selection of your applied project (central problem, issue or question addressed in study).

February 2

Relating ethics to the core curriculum

Description of methodology for addressing research question

Assignments: Read Cooper, Chapters 6-8. Make a power point presentation demonstrating the relevance of ethics to the following MPA core classes: PLS 500, 501, 502 and 503. Also turn in a hard copy for the instructor.

In three pages provide additional information on the background of your research question, theories about the problem you are addressing in your project, and methodology for your project. With the approval of the instructor, individuals and team should be prepared at this point to proceed with data collection.

February 9

SWOT Analysis of MPA program (in class) Self-Assessment

Assignments: Complete the Myers-Briggs and Career Anchors instruments and bring the results to class.

February 16

Completing a Portfolio Writing a Resume Selecting a Mentor Developing a Career Strategy

Assignment: Bring old resume to class. Get on the internet and develop a list of five currently available jobs in the marketplace that you currently qualify for. Make a matrix for power point comparing these five jobs in terms of salary, opportunities for career advancement, quality of life or life style considerations, access to other careers and jobs, and probability of securing the position. Present on power point and hand in hard copy.

February 23

Mentor Feedback Completion of Professional Portfolios

Assignments: Share feedback from discussion with mentor on career strategy (verbal only). Also turn in completed draft of professional portfolio for the class and Instructor to review.

March 2

Project update and consultation

Assignment: In three pages and with a power point presentation, give an overview of the status of your project, including summary of literature review and update on data collection effort. Provide a separate one page timeline with tasks that must be completed to meet due date. Turn in a hard copy.

March 9 – No Class (Spring Break)

March 16

Project update and consultation

March 23

Project update and consultation

March 30

Project update and consultation

April 6

Project update and consultation

April 13

Dry runs of class presentations

April 20

Final class presentation of projects for MPA faculty. Top three projects will be selected.

April 28 (Tuesday)

Presentation of top three projects and posters of all projects on reading day.

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Outline for Applied Research Project

- Executive Summary (3-5 pages)
- Central problem, issue, or question addressed in study
- Background and literature review on problem, including significance of the problem and theories about the causes of the problem
- Statistics documenting the problem, historical and comparative
- Obstacles to solving the problem, do a contextual analysis—look at problem or question from an organizational design and behavioral standpoint, finance and budget perspective, personnel and human resources perspective, policy and cost/benefit standpoint, and an ethical perspective
- Research design including quantitative and qualitative methods used to collect information
- Generate and analyze options for solving the problem
- Recommendations
- Annotated Bibliography (one page per item to include scope, theory/hypotheses, methods, findings, implications)...at least 20 items