

**The University of North Carolina at Wilmington  
Department of Political Science  
Spring, 2007**

**PLS 595: CAPSTONE SEMINAR IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

Instructor: Dr. Tom Barth  
270 Leutze Hall

Phone: 962-3385 (w) 231-1181 (c)  
Email: [bartht@uncw.edu](mailto:bartht@uncw.edu)

Office Hours: By Appointment

Class Hours: 6:30 p.m. – 9:15 p.m. Tuesdays  
Leutze Hall 111

Office Hours: 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. Tuesdays  
8:30 – 9:30 a.m. M-W-F

**I. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES**

The definition of the word capstone is “crowning point” or “acme – the highest point or peak.” Designed to be taken in the last semester by graduating MPA students, the purpose of a capstone seminar in a professional degree program is to top off the student’s education with a course that integrates or synthesizes what has been covered in the curriculum. In the past, this purpose has been addressed by writing a thesis or passing comprehensive written or oral exams. Increasingly, professional graduate degree programs are evolving to the capstone seminar approach, where students convene for an entire semester to discuss unifying themes in the field, professional expectations and career development, and complete an applied research project.

This capstone experience will focus on the following areas:

- Professional development, including reflection upon models for success in the field of public affairs and major issues facing public and nonprofit managers today.
- Career development, including self-assessment, career planning and design of a portfolio.
- Exposure to cross-cutting themes in the field of public affairs such as ethics, leadership and diversity.
- Design and completion of an applied, community-based research project that examines a public management or policy issue using the knowledge and skills learned through the curriculum.

## **II. REQUIRED TEXTS**

Warner, Jim (2002). *Aspirations to Greatness*. New York: John Wiley & Sons  
(available used on-line from Amazon.com).

Other readings as assigned.

## **III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### **A. Career Strategy Materials and Presentation (15%)**

To complete the career development component of the course, students must do the following:

- Complete a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Instrument
- Complete Career Anchor Inventory
- Develop and present a career strategy to the class, incorporating feedback from a mentor in the community. Due February 20.

### **B. Self-Assessment Essay (15%)**

Based on the book *Aspirations to Greatness*, students must write a five-page essay and present to class how well they balance their inner advisors in their professional lives.  
Due March 27.

### **C. Professional Research Project (55%)**

In order to complete the requirements for the Capstone and graduate from the MPA program, each student must complete a significant research project and make a presentation to the MPA community on May 1. Projects may be done individually or in teams, but must involve the analysis of a public policy or management issue. Class time will be set aside throughout the semester for team meetings and consultation with the instructor, but students are expected to work independently to design, conduct and deliver a product that is complete and professional.

The formal evaluation of each student's overall grade for the class will be determined by a combination of instructor evaluation, peer evaluation and client evaluation as appropriate to the project.

Failure to complete the project on time and in a professional manner will result in a grade of Incomplete for the course and delay graduation from the program. Failure to complete the project due to lack of effort will result in dismissal from the program.

#### **D. Professional Portfolio (15%)**

Students must compile a folder (appropriate for professional presentation) containing at least three papers from courses they have taken in the MPA program (papers should be edited). Students must examine these papers and their total experience in the program and write a five page descriptive essay describing what essential knowledge, skills and abilities they have learned (and share with class). Essays will be graded on clarity and writing. A polished resume must also be included. Portfolios will be assessed by peers in class as well as the instructor. Draft due on April 10 and final product due on April 24.

#### **IV. CLASS SCHEDULE**

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| Jan. 16 | <b>Introduction and Expectations/Discussion of Research Projects</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Self-assessment exercise (individual strengths and weaknesses).</li></ul>  |
| Jan. 23 | <b>Career Development: Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Career Anchor Theory</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Finalize projects and teams (where applicable).</li><li>• Diversity discussion (assigned reading).</li></ul>  |
| Jan. 30 | <b>Reports on Project Workplans</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Workplans and timeline charts for completion of projects.<br/>Each project must have in writing for presentation:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Working title</li><li>b. Question being answered</li><li>c. Discrete tasks that must be accomplished</li><li>d. Who has responsibility for completion</li><li>e. Timeline for completion of tasks to meet May 1 deadline (no extensions!)</li></ul></li></ul> |
| Feb. 6  | <b>Presentations on Most Significant Journal Article Read in Program</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Three page essay due.</li></ul>  |
| Feb. 13 | <b>Project Meetings and Consultation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Class time for team meetings and/or assistance from instructor.</li></ul>  |
| Feb. 20 | <b>Presentations on Career Strategy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assignment: Students must bring to class a power point presentation evaluating three career options and include a decision matrix analysis (identify set of most important criteria and rate each choice across these criteria). The presentation must also include a strategy for the coming year in terms of what the student will be doing to find a job or pursue their</li></ul>                               |

chosen career choice. This plan must be reviewed by a career mentor in advance of the presentation – the advice from the mentor must be reflected in presentation.

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| Feb. 27  | <b>Project Meetings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Class time for team meetings on projects.</li></ul>  |
| March 6  | <b>No Class – Spring Break</b>   |
| March 13 | <b>Project Updates and Consultation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Detailed reports on status of each project. Written summary of status of workplans.</li></ul>  |
| March 20 | <b>Ethics Forum</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lecture and discussion on core ethics concepts.</li></ul>  |
| March 27 | <b>Self-Assessment Discussion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sharing of 5 page essay on balancing four inner advisors described in <i>Aspirations of Greatness</i>.</li></ul>   |
| April 3  | <b>Career/Professionalism Roundtable</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussion with local practitioners on career options and keys to professional success.</li><li>• Three page essay on professionalism (assigned reading).</li></ul> |
| April 10 | <b>Leadership Forum</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lecture and discussion on core leadership concepts.</li><li>• Draft portfolios due for critique.</li></ul>   |
| April 17 | <b>Project Meetings and Consultation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Final preparation/fine tuning for project presentations.</li></ul>  |
| April 24 | <b>Last Day of Class</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Final Portfolios Due</li><li>• Feedback on MPA experience</li></ul>   |
| May 1    | <b>Capstone Presentations</b>  |