

PLS 595 – Capstone Seminar in Public Administration

Fall 2006

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Office Hours: M/T 5:00 - 6:00 & by appointment

Classroom: LH 110

Class times: T 6:30 - 9:15

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Course Objectives:

The purpose of a capstone seminar in a professional degree program is to complete the educational experience with a final course designed to integrate and synthesize what has been covered in the other classes in the curriculum. Specifically, the course objectives are to:

- Career and professional development including self assessment, career planning, and preparation for the job market;
- Applying theories, concepts, and skills developed throughout the MPA curricula through case analysis and an applied public service project;
- Reflection on your service experience, personal development, and future career objectives; and,
- Enhance your skills and ability to think, act, and communicate more effectively in today's public and nonprofit organizations.

These objectives will be met by working on an applied public service project, analyzing cases, exposing you to a variety of readings, class discussion, occasional guest speakers, and opportunities for reflection. Your oral communication skills will be developed through class presentations. The preparation of the final project, memos, and journal entries will further improve your analytical skills and improve your ability to communicate ideas and arguments in written form.

Readings:

The following books are required for this course and can be purchased at local book stores or through vendors on the Internet:

- Ashworth, Kenneth. 2001. *Caught Between the Dog and the Fireplug - or - How to Survive Public Service*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press. ISBN 0-87840-847-9; and,
- Mintrom, Michael. 2003. *People Skills for Policy Analysts*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press. ISBN 0-87840-900-9.

Additional readings will be distributed in class electronically or be available through the Library's electronic reserve system.

Expectations and Approach:

This is not a lecture-dominated class where the instructor speaks and the students passively listen. This is a seminar class where students take an active part in their learning through class discussions, group work, and case analysis. Course readings are supplemented with videos, occasional guest speakers, and other information available on the class web site. Part of your learning will be cognitive or factual in nature. However, much of what you learn in this course will involve developing your management skills, enhancing your self-awareness of the organizations in

which you have worked, and sharing your experiences with others in the class. I encourage you to prepare yourself for, and be open to, the variety of ways that you can learn from this course.

Teams will also play a part in your learning. Although you may prefer to complete assignments on an individual basis, teams often complete tasks more effectively than individuals and provide an opportunity to participate more than is possible in a larger class. Teams also provide an opportunity to work directly with and learn from your fellow classmates and allow you to observe how others analyze and solve problems. Moreover, work teams play an increasingly important role in managing today's public and nonprofit organizations. Therefore, it is important for you to develop your ability to work effectively in teams.

Another important part of your learning involves the analysis of case studies. Case studies are compilations of problem situations actually faced by public managers. A case places you into a real world situation and forces you to sort through and analyze various issues or courses of action. You will use the theories and concepts learned in your core courses to analyze several cases throughout the semester and present your analysis to the class. These assignments are described in more detail below and on the class web site.

Course Requirements:

Your grade in this class will be based on your performance on the following course requirements:

Class Participation

Students are expected to complete the assigned readings and come to class prepared to discuss all readings, handouts, and assignments that are due. Each student should also be prepared to share with the class questions from their public service projects and the readings and be prepared to identify the most significant point or contribution that the author makes to the practice of public administration.

While attendance will not be taken on a regular basis, poor classroom attendance may result in a failing participation grade since you cannot participate if you are not in class. Therefore, you should notify the instructor when you are unable to attend class. If you should miss a session when a video is shown, it may be possible to make arrangements to view the film privately at the library or to borrow the video. In certain circumstances it may also be possible to make-up other in-class activities with a written assignment if frequent absences have become a problem. Your participation grade will also be lowered due to the frequent inability to respond to the instructor's questions, poor class preparation, lack of enthusiastic participation in class exercises, or the failure to treat others in the classroom with respect (e.g., talking while others are talking, ridiculing other students, etc.). Simply put, in order to receive an "A" in this class you must be a civil, active contributor to class and not merely score well on exams and assignments.

Public Service Project

Each student will be required to participate in a public service group project. You cannot work on projects where you are currently or previously been employed or otherwise have a potential conflict of interest. Summaries of the potential projects are posted on the website. Whenever possible, there are real clients for the projects and you are expected to work with the client to reach agreement on the scope of work to be performed keeping in mind the deadlines associated with the class. You are free to organize your project team as you seem fit, however, you must have a project leader or spokesperson to report on your project.

Each project will result in one or more work products (e.g., report, grant proposal, etc.) that can be used in your portfolios. Keep in mind that when working in the community you are representing not only yourself but UNCW and the MPA program. Accordingly, you should behave professionally at all times. Your final reports and other work products should be professional in appearance and include a cover, table of contents, executive summary, reference list, and appendices as needed. At a minimum, you will present your findings informally to the client and formally to the faculty, students, and client agencies. Additional directions and requirements are posted on the website.

Your project grades will be based on both the quality of your presentation and the final written report. Your client will evaluate the usefulness of your final project. I will factor their impressions into the grading process. Your group grades will be your individual grades. You will evaluate your own contributions to the project in a required journal entry. A peer evaluation form will also be used when you complete your projects. Your individual grade may be adjusted lower if the team reports that one of its members did not contribute to the projects adequately. Audience members will critique your final presentation. I will use this information when determining your presentation grades. Your project grades will be based on both the quality of your presentation and the final written report. Your client will evaluate the usefulness of your final project. I will factor their impressions into the grading process. Your group grades will be your individual grades. You will evaluate your own contributions to the project in a required journal entry. A peer evaluation form will also be used when you complete your projects. Your individual grade may be adjusted lower if the team reports that one of its members did not contribute to the projects adequately. Audience members will critique your final presentation. I will use this information when determining your presentation grades.

Reflection Journal

This course is structured as a service learning experience. A critical element of this experience is to reflect on the experiences you have while undertaking a policy/management related project and working with your client. Accordingly, each student will be required to keep a journal. A journal is a place to record observations, speculate, raise questions, and figure things out. It is not a place to simply summarize the readings. In your journal you are free to write anything you want and a single entry could range from a paragraph to many pages. I expect the equivalent of about 4 single-spaced pages per week on average. If you are having difficulty finding something to write about, the discussion questions at the end of each chapter in the Mintrom book provide useful suggestions or you can relate the experiences discussed in the Ashworth book to your careers or projects.

You will also be required to complete several required journal entries that are posted on the website. You are free to keep the journal in any form you wish but should keep it updated as periodically I will collect the journals and you will share journal entries with other students at the end of class.

Case Analysis

One of the ways we will review your grasp of the theories and concepts discussed in the MPA curriculum is by having you analyze and present a case study. The case will also allow you to demonstrate your ability to diagnose a management/policy problem using the theories and concepts learned in the MPA program. It will also allow you to demonstrate your ability to concisely present your findings. Accordingly, each student will be required to present their analysis of a case study, prepare a professional memorandum summarizing their findings, and include an attachment that discusses the case in light of the theories and concepts covered in the MPA curriculum.

Career Development Activities

This is a professional program and most students will be entering the job market while completing the class. Accordingly, a theme of course discussions will be related to career development. Accordingly, students will be required to participate in several exercises (e.g., Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Instrument & Career Anchors Inventory) and complete several short assignments including a resume, a portfolio, and one of the required journal entries will address career planning and development.

Grading:

All written work will be evaluated based on your analysis of the readings and cases, the organization of your ideas, the strength and substance of your arguments, your ability to properly apply the concepts discussed in class, and the quality of your writing (e.g., spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc.). Failure to complete an assignment or failing to follow directions will result in a 0 for the assignment. The final course grade will be calculated based upon the following weights:

<i>Class participation (10%)</i>	10% (100 points)
<i>Case Analysis (15%)</i>	
Presentation (5%)	5% (50 points)
Memo & Attachment (10%)	10% (100 points)
<i>Journal (15%)</i>	
Weekly entries	5% (50 points)
Required entries	10% (100 points)
<i>Career Development Activities (5%)</i>	
Resume	5% (50 points)
Portfolio	5% (50 points)
<i>Public Service Project (50%)</i>	
Final Deliverables	40% (400 points)
Final Presentation	10% (100 points)

Course grades will be calculated based on the following: A (920 – 1000), A- (900 – 919), B+ (880 – 899), B (820 – 879), B- (800 – 819), C+ (780 – 799), C (720 – 779), C- (700 – 719), D+ (680 – 699), D (620 – 679), D- (600 – 619), and F (0 – 599). Be advised that you must maintain a B average to remain in the MPA program. I have a zero tolerance policy for cheating. Anyone caught cheating will receive a failing grade for the course.

Late Assignments/Incompletes:

Tentative due dates for course assignments are listed on the attached course schedule and are subject to change based on class progress and student preferences. You should check the course schedule and announcements pages on the course web site periodically for changes in due dates. Students may bring forward requests for changing the dates of major assignments for class approval with a minimum of one-week advance notice to the class.

Unless I have agreed in advance, all assignments are due at the end of the class period they are due. Informing the instructor of your intention to be absent does not waive your obligation to submit the work that is due. Late assignments lose one full letter grade per class they are late. An incomplete will only be granted when there are serious extenuating circumstances that occur after the withdrawal period.

Other Class Policies

All cell phones are to be turned off in class. If your phone rings, the Professor reserves the right to answer the call and/or to confiscate the phone.