

PBPL289: Capstone Research Project (Winter and Spring Quarter, Year Two)
Instructor: A designated faculty (on a rotating basis)

BACKGROUND

The Capstone requirement is a graduate-level research project. Students will investigate a topic of policy significance and relevance, producing a research paper of a publishable quality. In addition to providing new insights on the topic of investigation, the Capstone Project is also designed to foster the integration of learning by incorporating knowledge that has been acquired throughout the 2 year program.

The two-quarter-long required capstone research project will be undertaken under the supervision and coordination of a designated faculty member serving as an instructor to the PBPL289 Capstone Research Project Class. The Instructor will approve all projects by determining their appropriateness, relevance and timelines, following the guidelines established by the MPP faculty. The instructor will also grade the project reports.

In addition to the instructor, faculty members will mentor individual capstone projects that are in the discipline of these faculty members. They will meet with the students, upon demand, during the project preparation, and guide the students.

OBJECTIVES

Students will demonstrate rigorous research skills;

Provide an original and deep analysis/understanding of a local, international or global policy issue, culminating in a research paper;

Students will display excellent analytical, writing and referencing skills of publishable quality;

Students will showcase excellent presentation skills when presenting the paper's findings.

REQUIREMENTS

The following are the requirements of the capstone project:

1. The project will be a group or team project, with a typical team size being 2-3 students, assigned by the Instructor. Teamwork better mimics how policy analyses are executed in the "real world";
2. Project theme will be identified and agreed on among the team members and the instructor, in collaboration with the mentor(s);

3. Capstone project should be developed having in mind an existing policy question, being discussed or deliberated by an agency, or a policy that has been already applied and could be improved. The following is an example of a required outline of the final paper/report to the “agency”:
 - a. Background on the agency, the socioeconomic situation, and the policy issue at stake
 - b. The reasons for the policy
 - c. The groups affected directly and indirectly
 - d. The suggested policy and it’s a-priori expected impacts
 - e. Detailed design of the policy interventions
 - f. Detailed implementation plan
 - g. Detailed evaluation plan
 - h. Discussion of possible unseen problems that can derail the policy and what can be done to prevent/minimize it
 - i. Conclusion

Additional aspects to be taken into account

- Paper length should be 25-30 pages (but can be longer to allow for additional text, an executive summary, a bibliography, graphs, figures, and/or appendices) and follow standard academic writing style and referencing/citation criteria.
- In order to facilitate individual assessment, each student in a Capstone Project will be a lead author of a section or sections of the final paper (Contribution will be indicated as part of the authorship).
- The group report will be evaluated by the instructor and at least two reviewers, at least one of whom will not be the group mentor;
- The group report/paper should be comprehensive and integrate the knowledge acquired by students in two or more courses, and should reflect the students’ training in methodology;
- Each student in the group is responsible for preparing a 2-page policy brief with agency audiences in mind;
- At the conclusion of the project, students will present their work in a 1-day symposium that may include possible policy clients in the audience.

SAMPLE TOPICS

The following is an illustrative list of capstone project topics: violence prevention in high schools; narrowing student achievement gaps in low-achieving school districts; improving the enrollment of farm workers and their families under the Affordable Care Act; increasing the acceptance of HIV testing among minority and at-risk populations; creating high-quality jobs (beyond warehousing) in Inland Southern California; and conserving water through rational water pricing.

Note: that this is only an illustrative (and non-exhaustive) list of project topics.

GRADING

Final grades will be determined by the quality and timely completion of all required work. Note that students will receive an “In Progress” grade after the first quarter, and a final grade at the end of the second quarter.

Breakdown: Final Paper 60%

Policy brief 10% (one brief per student)

Oral Presentation 25%

Meeting/Communicating with Instructor and Mentor 5%

Grading Criteria for Paper:

1. Content, Research, Sources – 45%
2. Grammar/Writing – 15%

Grading Criteria for Presentation:

1. Content – 10%
2. Communication – 5%
3. Creativity (i.e., effective use of media) – 5%
4. Time/Organization (i.e., time management) – 5%

Grading Scale

A	95 -100 points	B-	80 -82 points	D+	67 –69 points
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A-	90 – 94 points	C+	77 -79 points	D	63-66 points
B+	87 – 89 points	C	73 -76 points	D-	60 – 62 points
B	83 -86 points	C-	70 -72 points	F	59 below

WEB DISTRIBUTION

MPP will have a Working Paper Series portal on the School website. Final Capstone papers will be uploaded (as PDFs) to showcase your work, making the findings and research available to the wider community be it academic, professional, or policy. These papers can also be used as writing samples in your job seeking efforts.

PLAGIARISM

Each group will be developing a unique research paper over the course of the term. Aside from potentially landing you in academic trouble, plagiarism will not be tolerated. We emphasize the importance of all work in this class being your own original work. You may neither try to pass off the work of others' as your own, *nor may you recycle material you have written in other contexts without significantly revising it or speaking to the instructor.* When using the ideas of others, standard citation should be employed.

SAFEASSIGN ON ILEARN

Your paper is subject to review by SafeAssign (a plagiarism detecting service) on iLearn. The instructor will conduct this review prior to grading. You will not receive a grade until your paper is submitted to SafeAssign.