The University of Washington
Daniel J. Evans School of Public Policy & Governance

PBAF 608 F: Capstone Project Seminar
Winter & Spring Quarters 2016
Fridays 9:30am-12:20pm
Parrington Hall (PAR) 112

Course website: https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1025216

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Office hours:
Thursdays 9-11am
or by appointment

Course overview

The goal of this seminar is to help you complete a research project that satisfies degree project requirements and (for those doing public service clinics) meets the needs of a client. This seminar and project will also help prepare you to conduct projects during your professional career. In a structured format, the seminar works through the stages of developing and executing such a project, while enabling you to learn from each other, from the literature on research methods, and from the instructor’s experience. Students will complete projects that span a variety of topics and methods, in areas that include policy analysis, program design, management, and evaluation. Assignments will keep you on pace to complete the final report by the end of the spring quarter. Upon successful completion, you will have learned to:

- Develop a research question that is feasible to investigate over two quarters and provide an answer your client will find valuable.
- Design a research project that gathers relevant data and uses appropriate methodologies to answer the research question.
- Work with a client to manage and meet expectations.
- Prepare a written report that clearly presents your research, findings, and recommendations.
- Prepare and deliver a concise and engaging presentation of your findings.

Expectations

Reading and written assignments must be completed prior to the class sessions in which they are noted below. You will regularly present your work in progress to the class, and offer constructive comments on others’ work, both in class and electronically. In addition, we will explore issues related to applied research through discussions of the assigned reading and possible presentations by invited guests.

The structure of the seminar will vary widely from week to week. Most weeks during the winter quarter we will meet as one group. These sessions will provide opportunities to work together as you craft your research question, negotiate the terms of your relationship with your client, select your research methods, gather and analyze data, and begin your written report. You should use
these opportunities to try things out and think creatively and ambitiously. Unlike many other Evans School classes, there are no wrong answers in this class; there are only more or less useful and feasible research questions, more or less rigorous research methods, and more or less comprehensible and compelling written products and presentations. The goal of these class sessions is to provide you with a safe environment in which you can discuss your progress and receive feedback from your classmates and me so that you can refine and improve your ideas. I will create a supportive environment in which each of you feel comfortable discussing your work and receiving constructive feedback. In exchange, I expect that you come to each seminar prepared to discuss your ideas and progress, and constructively and respectfully critique others’ ideas and progress. During weeks when we do not meet, which will mostly be during the spring quarter, you will be expected to work on your research or meet with your client, fellow students, or me. These weeks are not breaks. They are a time when you are expected to move your project forward.

Please keep in mind that you are undertaking a very large project, with the vast majority of the work occurring outside the classroom. One of your most important tasks is to decide how to manage this time so that you deliver your client an outstanding product at the beginning of June. You will work in the early part of the course on putting together a schedule and work plan, and your classmates and I will do our best to help you stay on that track. But it is your responsibility to decide how best to spend your time and ensure you are making adequate progress.

**Syllabus disclaimer**

This syllabus is a guide for this course that is subject to change. I will notify students of any changes to the syllabus as early as possible during class and/or via email and Canvas.

**Optional Books on Research Methods**

The following books are not assigned for class. They provide guidance on how to develop high-quality research projects.


In addition, I have a variety of books and readings on research design and methods in my office, which I would be happy to lend to students on a short-term basis.

**Assignments and Grades**

Some assignments must be posted to Canvas by noon on the day before class meets. Thus, if we are meeting on Friday January 8, the assignment due for that weekly meeting must be posted by January 7 at noon.
I will use the grades specified in the Student Handbook: 4.0, 3.7, 3.4, 3.2, 3.0, or 2.6. Please see the interpretation of these grades provided in the “Evans School Guidelines for Course Grades” in the MPA student handbook.

Your course grade will be based on the following components:

- **(20%)** Class participation and professionalism. Class participation means that you come to class prepared and actively participate. This includes adequate preparation when giving progress updates, earnest participation in peer review processes, and providing constructive feedback to your classmates during class. Professionalism means that you behave in a professional manner during all aspects of the project. This includes positive and appropriate communication as well as attending class and outside meetings as expected. Professionalism is expected in all interactions with classmates, teammates, clients, sources (e.g., interviewees), and the professor.

- **(10%)** Intermediary products. You will be asked to submit a variety of intermediary products, primarily during the first half of Winter Quarter. These products are intended to help you organize your project and dive into the substance as soon as possible. Your grade will be based on thoughtfulness, completeness, and timeliness.

- **(10%)** Draft of Chapter 1 and annotated outline. You will be graded on the thoughtfulness and completeness of this assignment. There will be a 0.1 penalty for each day you are late in submitting this draft (i.e., if you receive a grade of 4.0, but turn it in one day late, your grade will be 3.9).

- **(30%)** Third draft of report. This is the report that will be circulated to the client for comment. You will be graded on the quality and completeness of this draft. There will be a 0.1 penalty for each day you are late.

- **(20%)** Final report. You will be graded entirely on the quality of the report, with a 0.1 penalty for each day you are late. The report must be complete. I will return it ungraded if it is not complete and final.

- **(10%)** Final presentation. Your presentation will be graded in terms of how well you communicate your research question, methods, findings, and recommendations. Prepare the presentation as if you are giving it to your client.

**Evans School Community Conversation Norms**

Please note that everyone in our course is expected to behave ethically and professionally at all times. By registering for this course, you agree to abide by the ethical and civil discourse norms of the Evans School and the University of Washington. Specifically, you agree to: 1) not claim the work of others as your own; and 2) respect members of our Evans School learning community.

For guidance on how to behave respectfully with other members of the Evans School community, please refer to the Evans School’s Community Conversation Norms, reproduced below:
At the Evans School, we value the richness of our differences and how they can greatly enhance our conversations and learning. As a professional school, we also have a responsibility to communicate with each other—inside and outside of the classroom—in a manner consistent with conduct in today’s increasingly diverse places of work. We hold ourselves individually and collectively responsible for our communication by:

- **Listening** carefully and respectfully
- **Sharing** and teaching each other generously
- **Clarifying** the intent and impact of our comments
- **Giving and receiving** feedback in a “relationship-building” manner
- **Working** together to expand our knowledge by using high standards for evidence and analysis

**Academic integrity**

I expect each student to act honestly and sincerely with respect to this course and its related activities. Any student suspected of academic misconduct will have the option of receiving a zero on the assignment in question or appealing the decision to the Dean’s Representative. In the case of repeated or large-scale suspected academic misconduct, the matter will be referred to the Dean’s Representative for resolution. This policy aligns with UW’s recommended policies for addressing academic misconduct.

Academic misconduct includes plagiarism, cheating, and fabricating information. Plagiarism is using another person’s words, ideas, artistic creations, or other intellectual property without giving proper credit. The current MPA Student Handbook includes additional information about what constitutes plagiarism or other academic misconduct.

**Policy regarding students with disabilities**

In partnership with UW’s Disability Resources for Students (DRS), I am committed to providing reasonable accommodations to qualified students with disabilities. Any student requesting academic accommodation based on a disability is required to register with Disability Resources for Students (DRS). If you are anticipating accommodation, please let me know by email within the first week of the quarter.

**Online Resources**

The Evans School has assembled some materials that you should review as you develop and complete your research:

- Capstone Project website: [http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/capstone-projects-overview](http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/capstone-projects-overview)
- Public Service Clinics website: [http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/public-service-clinics](http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/public-service-clinics)
- For applied research methods, literature reviews, and high performing teams, see: [http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/research-writing-and-team-resources](http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/research-writing-and-team-resources)
- List of award-winning DPs: [http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/student-awards](http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/student-awards)
- Capstone projects archive: [http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/capstone-project-archive](http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/capstone-project-archive)
The Final Report

A complete report is likely to contain most of the following elements. Exact content will vary based on the topic and type of report.

- Cover page, executive summary, and table of contents
- Introduction (with topic, client’s objective, research question, and key findings)
- Diagnosis of the problem, key factors (explanatory variables), and supporting literature
- Research methods
- Analysis
- Findings
- Alternatives and trade-offs
- Recommendations
- Expected consequences of implementing the recommendations
- Evaluation plan during and/or after implementation
- References section and appendices

Human Subjects Approval

If your project involves the collection of data about living individuals using surveys, interviews, observation, administrative data, or private information and you plan to share your findings beyond the Evans School or your client organization (as in a journal article), you must obtain Human Subjects approval prior to the collection of data. It cannot be done retroactively. If your project will be submitted only to the Evans School and your client organization (and the individuals studied are employees, clients, or other members of that organization), then you do not need to go through the Human Subjects review process.
Winter Quarter Schedule

Week 1 – Jan 8 – Project Design, Management, and Expectations

During class: Introduction to participants. Course/project expectations. Project introductions and status reports. Scoping the project and research questions. Workshop draft materials (client agreement letters, work plans, team agreement letters).

Resources:
- “Proposal to Presentation” web site

Week 2 – Jan 15 – Teamwork, Review of Past Projects, Librarian Guidance

Read before class:
- “Literature Review.”
- “How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography.”
- Two award-winning capstone projects of your choice. (To find them, visit the page that lists the winners for the Narver, Pealey, and Public Service Clinics prizes. Then go to the archive to review two projects that won one of those three prizes.) As you read, develop a set of criteria for what makes a good degree project, including what makes it useful for a client.
- Teams: review the section on teams: https://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/research-writing-and-team-resources

Product due (Canvas):
- One-page notes memo of what you learned from the Capstone projects you read about what makes a good capstone project. Use bullets to highlight each point.
- Draft research questions

During class:
9:30am: Teams only report for discussion on teamwork
10:15am: Everyone report for discussion on what a good capstone project looks like
11:30-12:30pm: All meet in the Allan Library (room TBA) for presentation by UW Public Affairs Librarian Emily Keller.

Week 3 – Jan 22 – Basic Research Methods

Read before class:

Products due (Canvas)
• Draft letter of agreement with your client (guidance and sample posted at http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/proposal-presentation) or, for independent projects, copies of correspondence with your client about what your project will entail.
• Draft work plan
• A one- or two-page proposal that defines your research question(s), the type of research you plan to conduct and how you will conduct it (including data you will gather, interviews you will conduct, and other methods you will use).
• Draft of annotated source list. (“Annotation” means a short explanation after each source that specifies the content and usefulness of the source for your project.)

During class: Discussion of basic research methods and relationship between research design and literature. Pros and cons of various research methods. Peer and class feedback on proposal memos.

Week 4 – Jan 29 – Designing Interview and Survey Questions

Read before class:
• Basic guidance for survey design.

Products due (Canvas):
• Signed letter of agreement with client.
• For teams: Signed team letter of agreement.
• For those talking to people: Memo with draft survey protocol, interview, and/or focus group questions, along with the population of individuals from which you will sample.
• For those not talking to people: Memo with data strategy, data sources, and/or other information gathering details
• “Final” work plan with timeline through May (one per team). Samples available at http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/proposal-to-presentation.

During class: Interview methods and survey designs. Peer and class feedback on protocols and research strategies. Amend protocols and data strategies.

Week 5 – Feb 5 – No class; Meet with professor (mandatory)

Product due (Canvas):
• For those talking to people: Revised survey protocol and/or interview questionnaire.

No class: Meet with professor to discuss your research methods and progress.
Week 6 – Feb 12 – Progress update presentations

Products due (bring to class):
- Handouts for reports

During class: Students present brief reports, with handouts. Includes discussion of any problems you are facing and how you are attempting to resolve them. Comments and feedback from students and instructor.

Week 7 – Feb 19 – No class; Meet with professor as needed

Week 8 – Feb 26 – No class; Introductory chapter and annotated outline

Product due (Canvas):
- Draft of your intro chapter and an annotated outline of the rest of your report. Your intro chapter should lay out your research question, the motivation of your report, the context and purpose of your project, and your methods and their rationale. After the intro chapter, append an outline of annotated chapters for the rest of your report. Note in your draft and outline how you plan to fill remaining gaps.

No class: Meet with professor as needed to discuss progress.

Week 9 – March 4 – Peer review of draft intro chapter and outline

Read before class:
- Draft chapters and outlines from another group or individual (to be assigned). Read each document you are assigned twice. On the first reading, edit for grammar and style. On the second, put yourself in the shoes of the client. Imagine that you are receiving a report that begins with this introductory chapter. Does the chapter lay out its purpose effectively? Is the methodology compelling – will you believe the results? Does the outline contain all the additional information and analysis that the introductory chapter promises? Does it seem like it will provide what the client needs? Come to class with suggested edits as well as at least two concrete general suggestions for improving the organization or content.

Product due (Canvas):
- Peer review comments.

During class: Peer review and commentary on draft chapters and outlines.

Week 10 – March 11 – No class; Meet with professor as needed

SPRING BREAK
Spring Quarter Schedule (Preliminary)

Week 1 – Apr 1 – Progress update presentations; First draft of entire report

Product due (Canvas):
  • First draft of entire report (with gaps to be filled and annotation of how they’ll be filled, including mock-ups of data tables to show how the data will be presented when gathered and analyzed).

During class: Updates on projects, research approaches that are working, envisioned, or scrapped. Problem solving about how to analyze data and draw findings. Draft reports will be distributed among students for review and feedback.

Week 2 – Apr 8 – No class; Meet with professor as needed

Week 3 – Apr 15 – No class; Meet with professor as needed

Week 4 – Apr 22 – No class; Second draft of entire report

Product due:
  • Second draft of entire report, with data analysis.

Week 5 – Apr 29 – Peer review of second draft of entire report

Read before class:
  • Assigned draft from another group or individual (to be assigned).

Product due:
  • Peer review comments.

During class: Peer review and commentary.

Week 6 – May 6 – No class; Third draft of entire report

Product due:
  • Third draft sent to client and professor for review.

Week 7 – May 13 – No class; Meet with professor as needed
Week 8 – May 20 – Practice presentations

Videos (please watch all of them before and after making your slides):
  • “Avoid Death by PowerPoint,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOrHxRB3JrQ.
  • “Presentations: Good/Bad Examples,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5c1susCPAE.
  • “Killer Presentation Skills,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whTwjG4ZIJg.

Product due:
  • Draft presentation that you will give to your clients.

Week 9 – May 27 – Presentations

Product due:
  • Presentations for non-Public Service Clinics.

Week 10 – June 3 – Presentations

Product due:
  • Presentations for Public Service Clinics.

Final draft due by June 7. Must be submitted to capstone archive.