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

PBAF 608E – Capstone Project Seminar  
Winter 2016  
Professor Zumeta

Professor Bill Zumeta  
Course email list: pbaf608e_wi16  
Office: Parrington 231  
Office hours: TBA and by appointment  
Office tel: 206-543-0743  
Email: zumeta@uw.edu

Overview and Course Objectives

The Capstone Project Seminar is a two-quarter class to help you complete your Evans School capstone project. For students participating in the Public Service Clinics (PSC), the capstone project connects your interests with the research needs of a public service organization and provides professional experience working for a client. For students doing independent capstones, the work is an opportunity to bring together the skills and knowledge acquired over your Evans School graduate career to conduct in-depth research on a topic of your choice, which ideally will have an audience that may resemble a client.

The seminar moves each student/team through the stages of developing an applied research project while integrating key learning from the Evans program as applicable. The seminar is structured to give students the opportunity to learn from each other, from other research, from clients as applicable, and from the instructor. In past years Evans students have found the seminar to be a very helpful device for keeping their projects moving forward, they have benefited from having some knowledge of the questions fellow students were wrestling with, and they have greatly appreciated and benefited from their student colleagues’ feedback which offers a valuable signal as to how one’s work will be received and interpreted by others.

Specific learning objectives include the following:
- Learn how to define the problem to be addressed in a way that is useful or meaningful to the client or audience
• Learn to identify and employ the appropriate research strategies and methods to address the problem in its various aspects
• Enhance your learning on how to prepare a substantial written report that provides rigorous, relevant analysis, cogent and compelling findings, and where applicable recommendations to the client or audience
• Practice in presenting research findings and recommendations before an audience in a concise, professional, and engaging way
• Practice in providing constructive peer review of colleagues’ work and of receiving feedback from others
• For client-based projects, experience in working with a client or “customer” for one’s work and in managing and meeting expectations

The type of learning and professional experience provided by the capstone project and seminar serves to integrate your learning across many of the courses in the MPA program, to begin your transition into the professional world of public service, and ideally to also build your resume for the job search as the author (or co-author) of a substantial, research-based professional report.

**Policies and Expectations**

The purpose of the class meetings is to assist the student in completing the final capstone paper or report for his or her client. Seminar discussions will bring additional resources and the guidance of other researchers (peers and the instructor) to the students. The goal is to provide a focused and structured discussion and writing environment facilitated by peer and faculty interaction that supports students in developing and completing their projects and the various milestones along the way. Individuals benefit from “commitment devices” including agreeing to share their progress with the class and closer feedback and review from specific other members of the seminar. We will try to accomplish this while keeping the logistical and additional time costs to a minimum, and allowing each seminar member sufficient flexibility to proceed with their topic in the manner that fits it best.

Discussions will focus on the substantive content of each student or team’s project, and students will be expected to make informal presentations of their work in progress. In addition, these discussions will seek to capture the synergy among projects, expand the use of effective research methods, and increase collective understanding of current policy and management challenges. Seminar assignments will keep students on pace to complete the final report by the end of the spring quarter (mid to late May). It is the student or team’s responsibility to stay on top of their project and maintain communication with the client if applicable. The CP is a large project, and the vast majority of your work on it will occur outside the classroom. One of your most important tasks is to decide how to manage this time so that you deliver an outstanding product in a few months and graduate! We will
work in the early part of the class on putting together a schedule and work plan, and your classmates and I will do our best to help you stay on that track. Ultimately, though, it is your responsibility, rather than your client’s, your classmates, or mine, to decide how best to spend your time and to make sure you are making adequate progress and meeting expectations along the way.

*Community conversation norms:* Please note that everyone in this class 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 to 2) not disrespect 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](http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/community-conversation-norms): At the Evans School, we value the richness of our differences and how they can greatly enhance our conversations and learning. 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

*Evaluation:* Since the primary tangible goal of the seminar is to produce quality capstone projects, the quality of the final product will determine the lion’s share of your course grade. In general, all members of a project team will earn the same grade but I reserve the right to differentiate grades if there is clear evidence of differential contributions. Meeting in-progress deadlines and contributions to the seminar, including providing quality, timely feedback on peers’ work, are also important and will receive significant weight in final course grading. Here is the weighting that I have in mind for determining the final grades.

- **Quality of final capstone report/paper:** 65%
- **Oral presentation of analysis and conclusions:** 10%
- **Contributions to the seminar and meeting in-progress deadlines:** 25%

*Resources*

There are numerous resources related to capstone project research and writing at the webpages linked below (see first week on syllabus), including an archive of previous projects. You should familiarize yourself with all these resources so that
you will know where to go for resources applicable to your project. I will also make other resources available to the class or to individuals or teams as applicable.

Week-by-Week Schedule

*Note: This schedule is subject to adjustment as I get experience with the course and based on needs of the students' projects.*

Jan. 8 – Introduction and Getting Started
Introductions of people and projects
Review syllabus, course objectives, format, and policies
Negotiate office hours
Instructor comments on managing big projects and working with clients
Discuss materials assigned for today (see below)
Touch base with each of the PS Clinic teams re client meetings
Meet or set up meeting times with each of the individual capstone project students

Assignments due; Read:
- Advice from past PSC students
- Evans School policy on academic integrity
- UW policy (federally mandated) re research involving human subjects
- Proposal to Presentation page including the sample work plans
- The Getting Started worksheet (email attachment; **bring to class**)
- The client Letter of Agreement template (for those doing client-based projects)
- The materials on working in teams, work styles, and conflict management
- The one-page pdf document on literature reviews
- Note the availability of materials for later use on topics such as literature reviews, interviewing, survey design, other research topics, and citation formats. (You can dig into these more later as applicable to your project.)
- **Read one or two of the earlier capstone projects from the capstone project archive.** One approach would be to select projects similar in topic to your own. Another would be to read prize-winning projects, which are identified at: [http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/student-awards](http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/student-awards)
- Make some notes and come prepared to talk about what you learned to do (or avoid) from this reading.

*Note: All materials above (except the Getting Started worksheet) are available or linked at: [http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/public-service-clinics](http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/public-service-clinics)*

Some items are on the menu at the left under Capstone Projects and Public Service Clinics, others are at the research, writing, team, and presentation resources link. See also the capstone project archive link.
Jan. 15– Getting Started II

Reflections on client meetings/contacts: What is the scope of the problem to be investigated? What are the client’s expectations? What are the key research questions and tasks? What challenges do you anticipate?

Drafting a work plan for your project and sticking to deadlines

Drafting the letter of agreement with your client (or something similar)

Communications- within team, with client, with me

Working out team agreements (including a memo of commitments and agreements)

Getting started on first research tasks: what will I/we do this week?

Further discussion of what makes a good capstone project based on student reading of earlier projects

11:30- Workshop on literature reviews with Emily Keller, Public Policy Librarian (at Allen Library)

Assignments due:

• Due to instructor by 1 PM on Wed., Jan. 13- Each student to submit a one page memo of observations on each of two previous capstone reports he/she has read. These memos should include:
  a statement of the problem covered; a summary of what the student or team did; a summary of the conclusions and recommendations and their basis; and a paragraph or so on what you learned from reading this CP on what to do (or improve upon) in yours.

• In preparation for the library workshop on Jan. 15-
  • Read “Literature Reviews” (a 1-page pdf document on the PSC site)
  • Watch the 3 short videos on “Writing the Literature Review” on site

Jan. 22–Getting Started III and Research Methods I

Finalizing client letter of agreement & team agreements (where applicable)

Finalizing the work plan and timeline (for client approval)

Sharing of other tasks accomplished in previous week

Discussion of relevant research methods with specifics based on needs of students’ projects

What will I/we do this week?

Assignments due by 1 PM Wed., Jan. 20:

• Clinics teams to submit their proposed final client agreement letter, work plan and timeline, and team agreements MOU for my approval before submission to the client (note: MOU does not go to the client).

• Other capstone students to submit final work plan and timeline by same date.

• One page outline of literature review plans (as applicable)

• Possible readings on methods TBA
Jan. 29 – Research Methods II
Sharing of tasks accomplished during previous week
What I/we will do this week
Further discussion of applicable research methods
Discussion and joint problem solving on challenges foreseen or emerging in the various projects

Assignments due:
• 1-2 page written progress report from each project (due at 1PM Wed., Jan. 27). This should include a summary of lit review findings to date.
• Readings as applicable TBA

Feb. 5 – Individual project meetings with instructor
I will distribute a sheet for each team to sign up for a 30-minute slot to meet with me during the class time or office hours.

Feb. 12 – Progress reports in class
By this time students/teams should be ready to talk coherently about their progress in relation to their original work plan, including what their literature review has produced that is of relevance, and any adjustments they have made or feel are called for. They should be thinking about sharing their thinking on this with their client (if applicable and not already done). In addition to the literature review, other types of research such as interviews and design of surveys, or data gathering for financial or statistical analyses, should be well along as well. If there are challenges with any of these, report on them and seek help from the group.

Assignment due on Wed., Feb. 10, at 1 PM:
[1-2-page outline of what you plan to cover in class in your progress report. Other students don’t need to read these ahead but I will.]

Feb. 19 – Progress reports in class II?
If need be, we will meet for some time on this date to hear about progress from anyone who cannot be fit into the previous week's class. Otherwise this week is time for you to work on your own, with the instructor available for consultation as necessary.

Feb. 26 – Peer review of draft introductory chapter and outline of the rest of the final report/paper
In this class students/teams will work in dyads to offer peer review and constructive critique of the other dyad member’s written product. Each student will be responsible for reading and critiquing the work of two other projects. I will assign students to specific dyads closer to the event.

Assignments due on Wed. Feb. 24, at 9 AM (note earlier time):
• First draft of your introductory chapter and an annotated outline of
The rest of your report. Your introductory chapter should lay out your research question, the motivation, context, and purpose of your project, and your methods and their rationale. The rest of the document should be outlined so that the final shape is clear. These will be peer-reviewed. To facilitate this review, note in your draft and outline how you plan to fill remaining gaps.

- Read introductory chapters and outlines for two others in the class as assigned. Your task is to provide feedback on both style and content. 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 (or other intended audience). Imagine that you are receiving a report that begins with this introductory chapter. Does the chapter lay out its purpose effectively and efficiently? Is the methodology compelling—will you believe the results? In short, are you going to keep reading the rest of the report? Does the outline contain all the additional information and analysis that the introductory chapter promises? Does it seem like it will provide what you the client or intended audience will need to make use of it? Come to class with suggested edits as well as at least concrete suggestions for improving the organization or content of both the chapter and the rest of the product outlined. Make your suggested edits electronically and either bring your laptop to class or print them out (with sufficient copies) to share.

Mar. 4 – No class meetings during this week, which is to be spent in intensive work on your project

Mar. 11– Each student or team is to meet with me during office hours or class time this week. I will circulate a sign-up sheet.

Spring Quarter
(tentative, key dates only shown)

Apr. 1 – In-class progress reports
Apr. 11 – First draft of capstone project reports due!
Apr. 15 – In-class review and critique of drafts
May 2 – Second drafts due!
May 6 – In-class review and critique of drafts
May 20  – Third (hopefully final) drafts due!

May 27  – Oral presentations in class

June 3  – Final project report, formatted to Evans School standards and prepared for readers’ signatures, due!