PPD 546: The Professional Practice of Public Administration
Price School of Public Policy
University of Southern California

Instructor: Foster Kerrison   Spring 2018
Office Hours: By appointment   W 6:00-9:20pm
e-mail: kerrison@usc.edu   VKC 256

Course Description

This is the capstone course for the Master of Public Administration (MPA) degree.
As the capstone course for the MPA, this course assumes that students have completed
most of their core courses and management competencies. The primary goal of the course
is to give students supervised experience in conducting client-oriented research and
analysis. This experience will reinforce, through application, the skills developed in the
MPA program, and prepare students to enter a professional career. Through their work in
the capstone projects students will hone and demonstrate these abilities that are identified
as universal competencies for all accredited schools of public affairs and administration:
● to lead and manage in public governance;
● to participate in and contribute to the policy process;
● to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions;
● to articulate and apply a public service perspective;
● to communicate with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.

In the course students will work individually and collectively to scope the problem facing
the client, identify an appropriate study methodology, conduct research and collect data,
analyze information collected, and develop findings and recommendations. They will
produce a number of interim products all of which will contribute to development of a
project report that will be written in stages, with several revisions in response to
instructor comment.

Learning objectives. This course requires students to apply the technical skills they have
acquired to analyze complex problems in the public and non-profit sectors that require
both technical expertise and political and organizational reasoning. The specific
objectives are:

- **Professional practice in public administration.** Conduct research and policy
  analysis for a client, and produce a professional report. Students will develop the
  appropriate research design for the project, collect necessary data, apply the analytic
  skills necessary to address the issue at hand, and produce a well written and

analytically sound report. The process and product should demonstrate the key competencies listed above.

- **Client relations and teamwork.** Develop the interpersonal skills and polish to interact productively with the client. Students will manage teamwork and promote a constructive consulting relationship with the client. Students will negotiate the consulting relationship with the client to address issues such as expectations for the final report, scheduling of intermediate drafts, and consultation about issues that develop during the work. They will be respectful of the organizational and political environment within which the client operates.

- **Tradecraft.** Apply and polish skills required for effective practice, including professional writing and briefing. Students will write the final report in an iterative fashion, producing intermediate products and drafts. In addition, students will be required to give a briefing to the client and invited guests. Both the briefing and final report should have high production values.

Course Expectations

1. *Participation in class workshops.* The class will meet together irregularly, on the dates identified in the syllabus. These meetings will be workshops, requiring briefing on projects and group troubleshooting. Students must attend and participate in required workshop sessions.

2. *Individual memos and draft sections.* Students will prepare three individual writing products that together constitute 25 percent of the grade:

   - Issue Diagnosis and Workplan Memo (~2-3 pages): Summary of initial issue diagnosis from client interaction and individual research. Includes high-level summary of project plan and a table with specific elements of project methodology and associated timeframes.
   - Draft Report Section (~ 5 pages): An advance section of the draft report. This might include a report section or subsection, draft of the communications briefer; or a draft of associated appendices or support materials such as a case study report or methodological appendix.
   - Reflection on client presentation and capstone experience (~2 pp): Satisfies the USC requirement for a cumulative experience in the finals week. It will be a two-page memo that (a) summarizes your assessment of the client presentation and (b) provides a reflection on what you learned through the capstone experience.

3. *Relatively independent research.* During most of the semester, students will be expected to meet regularly as a group, and to arrange meetings as required at the

convenience of the client. Once the client has approved the work plan, the team will work independently to conduct the research and analyze results.

4. *Faculty consultation.* Throughout the process I will be available to consult on issues that arise, but will try to avoid making decisions for you. I can arrange to meet with a group during the scheduled class time or by appointment.

5. *Final report.* The team members will collaborate in the iterative production of a professional report to the client. The grade is based on a first draft and the final report. Students should break the report into sections to write in advance (e.g., problem definition, organizational context, alternatives, etc). Each member of the group must write an identified portion of the final report. All of the written products in the class will contribute to the creation of a professional report to the client. I *strongly* encourage students to write the report iteratively, giving me advance sections in draft form for comment in advance.

6. *Briefings.* You must provide a final briefing for the client and invited guests identified by the client. This briefing must employ PowerPoint presentation software—which may be converted to Adobe pdf for presentation purposes as circumstances dictate. We will conduct dry runs of the briefings in class prior to the final presentation.

7. *Short communications briefer.* Part of the final report expectation will be a four-page single-spaced communications "briefer" that synopsizes the report in a reader-friendly and professional manner, with excellent graphic elements.

In addition, during scheduled workshops you will be required to make oral briefings on your group progress. These briefings will be part of the basis for your participation grade.

Requirements and Grading:

Assignment	Length	Due date	Percent of Grade
Overall Participation			5
Issue Diagnosis and Work Plan	2-3 pp. dbl.	Feb. 2	10
Draft Report Section	5pp. dbl.	Mar. 9	10
Report draft	30-40 dbl.	Mar. 30	15
Briefing dry run		April 4, 11	10
Communications Briefer	2-4pp.	May 2	10
Final staff report	20-30 sngl.	May 2	35
Reflection on project and course	2pp. dbl.	May 2	5

Form and style: The work plan and drafts must be double-spaced. The final report must be single-spaced. The communications briefer must be 2-4 pages, in a format of the team's choosing. All assignments must be written in plain, concise prose, as described in

Strunk and White's <u>Elements of Style.</u> The client also will have the opportunity to provide expectations with regard to form and style.

Submission policies: All assignments must be submitted to the class Blackboard site using Turnitin at the end of the date identified in the syllabus (e.g, Sunday midnight). Please submit the documents in Word format, using the following naming protocols:

>Individual progress reports and peer reviews: lastname_progress_date.
>Group assignments (draft and final reports; briefers; PowerPoint slides): groupname_assignment (e.g., "LAUSD_draft_report).

Policy on late and missing assignments: Unless there are extenuating circumstances, late assignments will be graded down 10 percent for each day late. Please inform me in advance if you must miss a deadline.

Syllabus revision. Circumstances may dictate changes to this syllabus as the semester progresses, in particular changes to class meeting dates. Any such changes will be communicated to the class as promptly as possible.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems
Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, " [Behavior Violating University Standards](#)." Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on [scientific misconduct](#).
Support Systems

- Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

- Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

- Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX compliance – (213) 740-5086

- Student Support & Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Suggested Readings - Generally Available through USC Library and Online

Books

Bardach, Eugene. (September 15, 2015). A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving. CQ Press; 5th edition.

Wildavsky, Aaron. (1987). Speaking Truth to Power: The Art and Craft of Policy Analysis.

Block, Peter (2011). Flawless Consulting: A Guide to Getting Your Expertise Used. 3rd ed. Austin: Learning Concepts.

Articles

Schwartz and McCarthy, Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time, *Harvard Business Review*. Available online at https://hbr.org/2007/10/manage-your-energy-not-your-time.

The Basic Presentation Checklist. *Harvard Management Communication Letter*, Oct. 2000, 3(10), p4.

B. Marton, How to Construct a Winning Presentation, *Harvard Management Communication Letter*, April 2000, 3(4), p5. (Business Source Premier)

COURSE MEETING SCHEDULE

Course Overview   ***Jan. 10***
- Discussion of project scoping; problem definition and work plans

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day   ***Jan. 15***

Research Design; Tradecraft Review   ***Jan. 24***
- Discussion of structuring group project and research design.

Issue Diagnosis and Work Plan due February 2

Workshop on Work Plans   ***Feb. 7***
- Each group must provide an oral briefing on the background of the problem, issues or policies it raises, work plan and deliverables. After revision each group will submit the work plan to the client.
- Discussion/evaluation of work plans.

Presidents Day   ***Feb. 19***

Workshop on Progress to Date; Report Elements   ***Feb. 21***
- Each group must provide an oral briefing on its progress to date, on the fieldwork or other research techniques it is using, and on any problems that are emerging in the research.
- We will discuss how to build interim products toward a final report, including incorporating visual aids.

Individual Draft Report Section Due to Instructor March 9

Meetings by Appointment   ***Mar. 7 and 21***
- Students conduct research and analysis; instructor available to meet by appointment during class time.
- Students must meet with instructor at least once during this period.

Spring Recess   ***Mar. 11-18***

Draft Reports Due to Instructor March 30

Briefing Dry Runs   *Apr. 4*
- Each group should deliver a 15-minute presentation.

Briefing Dry Runs, Continued (if necc.)   *Apr. 11*

Discuss of Final Products   *Apr. 27*
- Discussion of matching final products to client expectations.
- Discussion of briefing expectations.

Communications Briefer due in Class (April 27)

On or Before May 2
- Final report to client and instructor.
- Final briefing and communications briefer to client.
- Reflection on client presentation and capstone experience to instructor.