



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC POLICY

PLCY 698

“Public Policy Practicum”

Fall 2012

MWF 11:00 AM to 11:50 AM; New West, 219

Recitation: F 12:00PM to 12:50 PM; New West, 219

Public Policy Practicum (3): This course provides a bridge between policy analysis as it is studied in an academic setting and policy analysis as it is practiced in the workplace. One might consider it a “finishing school” for policy majors. The course is intended to help students synthesize what they have learned as Public Policy majors, and to help them apply that knowledge in a real-world setting. Considerable emphasis is placed on good communication skills, both verbal and written. After the first few weeks of class, students form consulting teams doing policy projects for real clients. The work provided to the client has to meet professional standards, so students will get both considerable guidance and help as they develop their work, but it is ultimately up to the students to develop their work. The second half of the course requires that students leave their student days and ways behind: they are now operating in the real world, and whether or not the project runs smoothly will be a function of their ownership and dedication to the project.

Instructors

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Course Description and Objectives

The Public Policy major is designed to help students acquire the tools to analyze a wide range of public policy problems. The major requires students to understand and accurately be able to apply concepts and methods from several disciplines to address critical public problems. Courses in the major allow students to acquire these skills under carefully controlled conditions. The capstone course, PLCY 698, provides a bridge between careful control and the messy real-world conditions students will encounter in the non-academic world they will work in upon graduation.

The ultimate objective of the course is for students to be able to prepare and present a high-quality policy analysis, program evaluation or policy-related project. The projects will involve real, local, national and international clients who have problems that involve issues and programs that have policy significance. Students will review the process of preparing an analysis and will be reminded of research resources and data that may be relevant to their projects.

Students will work with clients in a consulting group formed with other students in the class. Student consulting teams will develop a logo, brochure and business cards based upon their policy area and their own strengths. Assignments to client groups will be made on the basis of student interests to the extent possible.

Clients could include state and local government agencies, not-for-profit advocacy and membership organizations, the media and think tanks. The consulting groups will conduct background research, design an appropriate analytic approach, implement the approach, and craft recommendations for the client.

Because written communication is such a critical part of training in public policy analysis, considerable emphasis will be placed on the quality of the written documents. Several interim memos and a final summary for the client will be compiled. Some individual writing assignments will also be completed.

Similarly, oral presentation is an important skill for policy students, so a well-rehearsed, professional oral presentation of the analysis will be the final work product of the semester.

Attention Students: Special Considerations

Please understand that you will be doing real work for real clients, so your work cannot be just another of the many academic projects you have completed during your tenure at UNC-CH. This is called a capstone course for a reason. Doing real policy should be the culmination of your policy education. What you do matters critically to your client. In

some cases it will form the backbone of the documents they will use to make their case to legislators or others.

The time commitment for this course is more than a little significant. In normal courses, you should count on at least 1.5 to 2 hours out of class for every hour in class (so a 3 hour course should have a minimum of 4.5 to 6 hours per week outside of class). For this course, the ratio is often tripled for some weeks. I have worked on projects with students online very late at night --- sometimes for several days running. If you currently do not have this kind of time, please consider taking the course at another time when you do have the time. Alternatively, you could take another course option, or re-arrange your schedule so that you have the time necessary.

The time you need to commit to this course is a consequence of the additional burden this kind of work places on you. In a normal course, the syllabus tells you what you need to produce and when you need to produce it. In this course, after the first weeks, you will not only be responsible for the work, but you will be responsible for the schedule as well. You will have to plan and re-plan your work because as a real project unfolds, you will find that you need to change directions, get more information, alter your deliverable schedule, etc. Real work is both frustrating and really, really rewarding. If you believe that a project needs to have a single, invariant plan, you will be disappointed and if you persist in the plan you developed at the start of your work without doing any revisions as your work progresses, you will likely develop work that is not useful to your client and there is even the possibility that what you do could be damaging. This course is about finding and re-finding the way forward: it is not simply about producing work.

I can also tell you that you will look back with great satisfaction at the work you do this semester. You will have done amazing work to help real people.

We will use Sakai extensively --- including the virtual meeting facilities. You will also learn some new software that will help you schedule your work effectively.

Course Goals

At the end of the semester, students will:

- Be able to work with clients to turn messy problems into tractable ones;
- Know when iteration is necessary and know how to go back to a client without looking foolish;
- Be able to match statistical and data gathering techniques to problem types;
- Be able to think about a problem analogically;
- Be able to work closely with others on difficult problems under serious time constraints;
- Be able to produce a clear and concise policy analysis;
- Be able to present the analysis to the client clearly and effectively as a team.
- Come to love ambiguity

Course Format

The class will meet following a regular schedule for the first several weeks of the semester. After that, some teams will be meeting individually with the instructor, with a GRC or with a TA. Any team not meeting with one of these must have scheduled a meeting with a relevant expert during all class meeting times. You will be required to provide minutes of all meetings not with me.

Each consulting group should designate team members to direct the following: research, and analysis, presentation development and a work schedule and a team leader. You must communicate the team structure at the end of the first week of class. You will also be required to have an agreed upon dispute settlement and free rider avoidance plan by that time.

CRITICAL TIMELINE

The first two to three weeks of class will be a review of the policy analysis process and time to collect and read background information on your projects. The next two to three weeks will be devoted to refining the problem definition, alternatives and criteria and the development of a work plan for your analysis. You will then present your plan to your client. That will give you about 6 to 8 weeks to do all of the research, interviewing, surveys, telephone calls, etc. you will need to do to get the information you will need for your analysis. You should then take about 2 weeks for the analysis and about a week or so to develop the presentation.

Expected Demeanor

Students are expected to act in a professional manner. This means to attend all class meetings, come to class and hand in assignments on time, treat all members of the class with respect, be trustworthy and act with integrity.

Written assignments should be prepared with a word processor and should be thoroughly proofread, edited and spell-checked. Students are expected to use email and Sakai. Active participation in class and effective group interactions are also expected.

All of these behaviors, including class attendance, will affect the class participation grade. The grade will be lowered with unexcused absences, poor class participation and/or issues within the groups. There are relatively few client meetings during the semester (roughly 3). **IF YOU MISS A CLIENT MEETING AND YOUR ABSENCE IS UNEXCUSED YOU RISK FAILING THE COURSE IMMEDIATELY.**

The Capstone course is a unique opportunity for you to bring all of the skills you have learned as a policy major at Carolina to bear to help you solve a complex problem for a small government agency or non-profit organization. Your relationship to the instructor of this course changes after the first few weeks from teacher/student to employee/mentoring boss. The only difference between the relationship you will have

with your future boss and the relationship you have with your instructor after the first few weeks is that your instructor will tell you what your future boss will be thinking about your performance, but will not necessarily say. The other difference is that you will rarely ever get again the level of mentoring that your instructor will give you this semester.

Honor Code:

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has had a student-led honor system for over 100 years. Academic integrity is at the heart of Carolina and we all are responsible for upholding the ideals of honor and integrity. The student-led Honor System is responsible for adjudicating any suspected violations of the Honor Code and all suspected instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the honor system. Information, including your responsibilities as a student, is outlined in the Instrument of Student Judicial Governance. Your full participation and observance of the Honor Code is expected.

Grading

Grades will be based on individual performance, team performance and leadership weighted as indicated by the points listed below. Assignments will be given in the first few weeks as they are in a normal class. After that, you will work to set your own assignments. Make no mistake, however: you are setting the assignments that will allow you to produce professional quality work for your client. If your plan appears to fall short of that, you will have to redo it until it is sufficiently rich to make the instructor feel confident that you can reach that goal.

You are going to be a student in the first part of the course and you are going to be an employee in the second. The first two or so weeks of the course will be organized as a normal academic course. The remaining weeks will be organized as if the student is a member of a consulting team of which the professors and TA are the senior partners. In the ideal work situation, an employee is chosen not because he/she knows everything he/she needs to know coming in to the job, but because the employer believes that the employee is worthy of the time it takes to help the employee marshal what he/she does know in the service of the job. In other words, the best employer is a mentor, and that is what we will be.

The second part of the course will be graded on the weekly reports and on the final product. I can tell you that, as the senior partner in a “consulting firm”, I cannot and will not permit you to give a client shoddy work. We will work together until the client product is excellent. That means that you will be iterating your work as many times as is necessary to get this done. Your individual work in support of the group will be graded separately and will again go through all of the iterations necessary to make it excellent. In other words, you will receive a good grade in this course if you are prepared to do the iterations necessary to improve your work.

Assignments and weighting: All work listed must be accomplished: a missing assignment will earn you an incomplete or an F depending upon the circumstances. For example, you cannot simply choose not to get a CITI certificate because it is not worth much in terms of points, although the time involved might make that otherwise a rational choice. The assignments are necessary parts of what is required if you are to provide good work to your client.

Course Part 1: All writing assignments for this part of the course will be accompanied by a grading rubric.

CITI certificate: 1 point

Individual Paper (5 to 10 pages) on client and problem: 7 points

Team paper on client and problem: 7 points

Brochure and business cards (team): 5 points

Skills Acquisition Quizzes (individual) 5 points

Work plan (team): 20 points

Course Part 2: Since your clients **MUST** get excellent work, there is no question that the work they receive will deserve an A. The only question is whether or not you and your team will receive the A as well. That will depend upon your willingness to do what is needed to revise (many, many, many times) what you are doing to make it excellent. Think of your grade in this part of the course as an evaluation of your performance as an employee who is charged with working on a complex project. No one thinks the employee will do everything right the first time around --- partially because complex problems do not have “right” answers --- just plenty of wrong ones. Your employer will want you to take credible stabs and then both you and your employer can figure out what is right and what is wrong about what you have done so far. You will learn both to take criticism (constructive) to help you revise your work and eventually to be able to give yourself the criticisms as you step back to look at your work before you hand it in.

Since part of learning in this course is learning to deal with ambiguity --- to structure and pace the problem solutions you are trying to deliver --- this part of the course will have no grading rubrics. Again, you will be graded on how hard you work and how effectively you work to get done what you have set for yourself in the work plan.

Deliverables: 35 points

Individual Products: 10 points

Team Environment and Organization: 10 points

[This includes meeting minutes, ability to react constructively to problems, flexibility and respect for all people encountered.]