



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC POLICY

PLCY 698: Public Policy Practicum

Spring 2014

MWF 11:00 AM to 11:50 AM, 008 Gardner

Recitation: F 12:00PM to 12:50 PM, 008 Gardner

ALL SECTIONS WILL MEET IN 008 Gardner MWF 11

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 you synthesize what you have learned as Public Policy majors, and to help you apply that knowledge in a real-world setting. Considerable emphasis is placed on good communication skills, both verbal and written.

The work provided to the client has to meet professional standards, so you will get considerable guidance and help as you develop your work. After the first few weeks of class, you will stop operating as students taking a course and begin operating as young professionals in the real world. Whether or not your project runs smoothly will be a function of your ownership of and dedication to the project. You should be realistic about the time commitment work like this requires. When you leave school and take your first job, you will learn that doing what you need to do takes a good deal of time outside normal working hours. In general, if you are dedicated and determined, you will spend the time and, as a result, you will get the salary and advancement rewards in addition to having the satisfaction of having done a very good job. Here what you will get is a grade in addition to that satisfaction.

We are sure that you will be able to do some really amazing work for people who really need your help. We are equally sure that the work you do here will prepare you well to succeed when you graduate.

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. Students will be assigned to a specific section of the course based on which instructor is overseeing their project.

Clients include state and local government agencies, not-for-profit service-providing and advocacy organizations, the media and think tanks. The consulting groups will conduct background research, design an appropriate analytic approach, implement the approach, and provide data, analyses, and recommendations to 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 in addition to a project report and other deliverables, a well-rehearsed, professional oral presentation of the analysis and recommendations will be a 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 analysis 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 therefore significant. In normal courses, you should count on at least 1.5 to 2 hours out of class for every credit hour (so a 3 hour course should have a minimum of 4.5 to 6 hours per week outside of class). In this course you will be expected to put in whatever time is necessary to complete a professional-level work product for your client, even if it requires multiple revisions to do this. You can manage this time commitment to some extent by making sure you define feasible work products at the beginning, and divide the work product elements up effectively among your team members so that you aren't all trying to do everything together and can thus produce a more significant body of work together than you could individually. You will need to expect, however, that this course will nonetheless require more time and more intensive and constant commitment than most other courses. The payoff from this is that it will provide you both a work experience and a work product that will prepare you better than most students for work experience beyond college. We can also tell you that you will look back with great satisfaction at the work you do this semester. You will have done valuable work to help real people and organizations accomplish their mission.

We will use both Sakai and Google extensively – including their virtual meeting facilities. You will also learn some new software that will help you schedule your work effectively. If you do not already have a Google account (e.g. Gmail), you will need one, and it is easy and free to set one up.

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 accept and appreciate ambiguity

Course Format

The class will meet following a regular schedule for the first several weeks of the semester, with exceptions for class periods when you need to schedule meetings with your client. After that, we will continue to meet regularly as a class on Wednesdays, but Monday and Friday sessions will be devoted more fully to team work on your projects and to meetings with your instructor, teaching assistant, and/or other experts who can help you with your project. *These Monday and Friday sessions continue to be class obligations, not free time. You will be required to provide minutes of all meetings held during class times, including attendance as well as the substance of discussion and decisions, and to post these minutes promptly on Sakai.*

Each group should designate a team leader who will be responsible for convening team meetings and being a primary point of contact with the instructor and client, and a second individual who will have primary responsibility for recording and posting minutes of team meetings and monitoring the schedule for completing tasks. You must communicate the team structure at the end of the first week of class. You will also be required to develop an agreed-upon dispute settlement and free rider avoidance plan by that time.

CRITICAL TIMELINE

The first two weeks of class will include a review of the policy analysis process and time to collect, read, and summarize background information on your projects. The next two weeks will be devoted to refining your problem definition, alternatives and criteria and to development of a work plan for your analysis. You will then present your plan to your client for review and approval. That will give you about 6 to 8 weeks to do any further refinements that turn out to be necessary to your work plan as well as all of the research, interviewing, surveys, telephone calls, etc. you will need to do to get the information you will need for your analysis. If you hold to this schedule, this leaves you about 2 weeks to develop the final report and presentation, present them to the client, and make any final revisions the client requests. *So, as you develop your work plan, be sure that you give yourself enough time to learn new things and to revise your work.*

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. All resource materials and intermediate and final work products should be posted promptly on your group subfolder on the Sakai website, so that they are accessible both to all team members and to the instructor and TA. Active participation in class and effective group interactions are also expected.

All of these behaviors, including class attendance, will affect the class participation element of your 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 to bear all of the skills you have learned as a policy major at Carolina to help you solve a complex problem for a government agency or non-profit organization. Your relationship to the instructor of this course changes after the first few weeks from student/teacher to employee/mentor. 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 you will rarely ever again get 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, your assignments will be intermediate work products that you and your team have defined to contribute to your team's deliverable to its client and will be expected to represent professional quality work for your client. If your work appears to fall short of that, you will have to redo it until it is sufficiently detailed to make the instructor 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 instructors and TA are the senior partners. In the ideal work situation, an employee is chosen for a project not because he/she knows everything he/she needs to know coming into it, but because the employer believes that the employee is capable of learning their way into such a project quickly and effectively, and is therefore worthy of the mentoring 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.

Your grade for the course will be based primarily on the quality of the final work product you submit to the client as a team, but also on the quality of the intermediate work products and other roles you contribute to the team effort. We can tell you that, as senior partners in a “consulting firm,” we cannot and will not permit you to give your 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:

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: the assignments are necessary parts of what is required if you are to provide good work to your client.

Course Part 1: Needs to be completed by, roughly, the end of the 4th week of class.

CITI certificate

Individual Paper (10 to 15 pages) on client and problem

Team paper on client and problem

Brochure and business cards (team)

Skills acquisition workbook assignments, written and oral examinations

Work plan (team)

Course Part 2: Since your clients **MUST** get excellent work, we expect every team and each student on it to commit to producing A level work products for them. It is our job as instructors to see that you have the necessary help to get the job done well. It is, however, your job to take the help we give and find more if you need it so you can do a good job.

Deliverables (intermediate individual deliverables, and final team product)

Team Environment and Organization

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

Understanding the grading:

If you have done a bad job on the individual paper and tell us that you have no time to revise the paper, then your lower grade on the paper will stand. That goes for your performance on all other requirements of the first part of the course. In general, we expect you to revise your work until you have acquired the skills you need to have for this part of the course. You can get a lower grade as well if your team assessment

suggests that you have not contributed fully and fairly to the team's work products and leadership responsibilities.

Instructor, Teaching Assistants and Graduate Research Consultant:

In this research-exposure course, you will have regular access to intensive mentoring and assistance from your instructor and teaching assistant, and will also be working with a Graduate Research Consultant (Shanyce Campbell) who will assist you in the research project. The GRC program is sponsored by the Office for Undergraduate Research (www.unc.edu/depts/our). We encourage you to visit this website to see other ways that you might engage in research, scholarship and creative performance while you are at Carolina.