

**PPPA6008: MPA/MPP CAPSTONE**  
**SECTIONS 10 & 12, SPRING 2024**

Class Meetings

- ✓ Section 10: Wednesdays, 6:10-8:00 pm, Tompkins 303
- ✓ Section 12: Tuesdays, 6:10-8:00 pm, Tompkins 303

Instructor: Peter Linquti, PhD (he/his/Peter), MPA610

Office Hours: To be announced prior to first class. Schedule at [linquti.youcanbook.me](https://linquti.youcanbook.me). We can meet in person or by Zoom. Please indicate your preference when making an appointment. I'll answer quick questions by email; usually, I will respond within 24 hours (except weekends).

Prerequisite: Completion of all core courses, or permission of Program Director

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The capstone synthesizes components of the curriculum in a client-focused project. Your group will use the skills and concepts you have acquired in the program to conduct a project that meets professional standards. The semester culminates with a written report, a presentation of your work to your client, and a research poster session within the TSPPPA community.

In a capstone project, *both* content *and* process are important. For example, managing your client relationship – helping the client to define their objectives, knowing when to take the initiative, when to say “no”, finding creative solutions to issues that arise – can be as important as coming up with a clever methodology and gathering strong evidence.

Capstone projects are complex and demanding. They require intense coordination among team members, diligent management of your relationship with your client, careful planning, and efficient time management. There will be interim deliverables throughout the semester. Capstones have generally required an average of about 10 hours a week of team members' time. Students are urged to read the syllabus carefully and to plan their time accordingly.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this course, students will have:

- ✓ Scoped research to meet client needs, resolving analytic challenges in the face of ambiguity and dissonance;
- ✓ Practiced the simultaneous application of multiple disciplines to a policy issue;
- ✓ Identified and applied appropriate methods to execute and deliver a professional research-based product responsive to client needs;
- ✓ Increased their knowledge and experience in setting priorities and managing research and project processes effectively under time, resource, and evidence constraints;
- ✓ Developed their abilities and self-awareness to be a more effective team member;
- ✓ Enhanced their capacity to conduct culturally responsive work in a diverse and evolving society;
- ✓ Integrated and applied the knowledge and skills gained through the curriculum; and
- ✓ Communicated complex research findings effectively to academic and client audiences.

## **WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THE CAPSTONE PROJECT? THE CLIENT? THE STUDENTS? THE PROFESSOR?**

The short answer is “all of the above.” Sometimes, students get tripped up by the idea that their work has multiple audiences. Your project certainly must address the needs of the client organization by providing sound analytic work that can influence its decision-making. At the same time, your professor has to ensure that the project itself is the equivalent of a master’s thesis and/or comprehensive exam, as the final step in earning your degree. So, if your client has low expectations or modest needs, you may find yourself doing additional work – at the professor’s behest – to meet the requirements of the course.

Client- and professor-imposed constraints aside, bear in mind that your team has substantial discretion (and indeed is expected) to figure out how to conduct the project, what to leave out, what to keep in, and so forth. Navigating this process, while meeting the needs of multiple stakeholders in a single project, is a critical element of the capstone learning process. Put another way, successful capstone teams take “ownership” of their work and the finished product, rather than simply executing instructions provided by the client or professor.

- ☞ It is not uncommon to consult faculty other than your instructor during the project to access specialized expertise particularly relevant to your capstone.

## **A WORD ABOUT SCHEDULING**

We will meet as a class six times. Each group will also meet with me for 30-minute consultations three times during the semester. No deliverables are required for these consultations; just show up ready to talk about how things are going with your project. In weeks without meetings, students should be available to their teammates for group work at the scheduled class meeting time. Whenever the class meets as a group, you should be prepared to verbally provide a brief and informal, ungraded, status report on your project.

## **FUNDING**

If you need resources for your project that have a financial cost (e.g., local travel expenses), consult with Gregory Nelson ([ganelson@gwu.edu](mailto:ganelson@gwu.edu)) to see if the School can cover the expense. TSPPPA will cover the cost of printing your poster for the Capstone Expo.

## **READINGS**

In addition to our first class, which features one very short reading, there are three classes for which there is a set of readings that you need to do before coming to class. These readings are not listed here in the syllabus but are described on Blackboard.

## **COURSE ASSIGNMENTS**

Course assignments are below. Some are individual tasks while others are team submissions. Assignments should be submitted via email; for team submissions, please provide one submission per team. In some cases, full points will be awarded for meeting a milestone (e.g., peer reviews); in other cases, submissions will be graded using the scale in this syllabus.

Points	Requirement
50	Quality of Team Charter (Team)
20	Submission of CITI Certification (Individual)
20	Delivery of draft Letter of Agreement before submission to client (Team)
20	Delivery of Signed Letter of Agreement to instructor (Team)
100	Quality of Week 4 Project Presentation & Slide Deck (Team)
100	Quality of Research Review & Synopsis of Next Steps (Team)
25	Submission of Peer Review #1 (Individual)
50	Quality of Draft High-Level Report Outline (Team)
50	Quality of Draft Report (Team)
200	Quality of Final Report (Team)
200	Quality of Poster & Presentation at Expo (Team)
50	Quality of Draft Client Presentation Slide Deck (Team)
20	Confirmation of Final Presentation to Client (Team)
25	Submission of Peer Review #2 (Individual)
20	Completion of TSPPPA end-of-semester survey and course evaluation (Individual)
50	Teamwork (Individual) – based on instructor observation, reviews by peers

### ***Team Charter (Team)***

Your team should develop a written Team Charter that explains how your group will operate. It can be brief (2-3 pages), written in bullet points, and should address the types of questions listed in the assignment posted on Blackboard.

Effective teamwork is essential to a successful capstone project. Developing your ability to work as a team member is an essential workforce skill. Working on a team, especially for an extended period with tight deadlines is challenging. Given different working styles and the intensity of capstone, it is *only natural* that friction and misunderstandings will occur.

Addressing issues promptly is the best way to a successful outcome. Otherwise, problems tend to magnify as the work becomes more intense toward the end of the semester. For the most part, teams are expected to use their Team Charter to resolve teamwork issues without involving the instructor. If, however, issues arise that your team cannot resolve after concerted effort, please bring them to the instructor's attention.

### ***CITI Certification (Individual)***

Federal regulations require researchers to undergo ethics training and seek certification for research projects they undertake. Because capstone projects are considered "professional training" and are not ordinarily published, ethics certification offered by GW's Institutional Review Board (IRB) is not legally required for these projects. (If publication is pursued later, IRB approval may be required.) High ethical standards are an integral part of the TSPPPA curriculum, and these federal requirements certainly will be pertinent to careers as policy analysts. Accordingly, to ensure familiarity with these regulations, the online CITI Training Program must be completed with a score of 75% or higher. To get started, please:

- ✓ Register as a new user at [www.citiprogram.org](http://www.citiprogram.org)
- ✓ Set your Institution to George Washington University (not an “Independent Learner”)
- ✓ Navigate to “Add a Course | Human Subjects Research Training | Social & Behavioral Research Course (decline Good Clinical Practice Option)”
- ✓ Complete the course

Once you complete the CITI program, you will be provided a certification document that should be submitted to the instructor.

### ***Letter of Agreement (Team)***

Serving a client well means giving them the benefit of your critical and creative thinking and not being passive about the formulation of the project. Attachment A to the Letter of Agreement (LOA) with the client is meant to capture all salient aspects of the project and minimize the potential for misunderstandings. The LOA is scheduled to be provided to the client in the fourth week of the semester, after you’ve done enough work to be empowered to take a proactive stance when you negotiate the research design with the client. Not only do you probably know far more about all sorts of research methods than does the client, you bring a fresh look at a situation and may see valuable, relevant questions that the client ought to ask but has not.

Any client who insists that you frame your research in a way that is preordained to generate their preferred outcome — or insists that you must unquestioningly accept all of their policy assumptions — is a poor choice for a client. Any client who requires as a deliverable that you convert your research into a “compelling advocacy document” (as one prospective client wrote) must be informed that your role is to conduct neutral policy research.

Remember also that the capstone project is a research project. Two recent examples of client requests that did not meet course requirements were (1) the preparation of a grant application and (2) the development of outreach materials for the client’s promotional campaign.

A template for the LOA is on Blackboard. Clients were sent a copy in mid-December. You will need to develop and insert the project overview included as Attachment A. Clients often ask for edits; we are as accommodating as possible. If your client requests changes to the body of the LOA, please consult with me before agreeing to the client’s request. You will submit a draft LOA to me in Week 3, and the final version to the client in Week 4.

### ***Week 4 Project Presentation (Team)***

In Week 4 of the course, each team will present its project to the rest of the class. At this point in the semester, the project is only a work in progress, but the purpose of the presentation is to put some structure to the project. The presentation should give a brief overview of the client and its objectives for the project. The latest version of the research puzzle and research questions should be presented, as well as the team’s tentative plans for collecting and analyzing relevant evidence.

The presentation should conclude with a task-by-task schedule that demonstrates that the team has thought through the entirety of the project and outlined an approach that is feasible within the time available. Sample project schedules are on Blackboard.

Your presentation, because it is delivered prior to your actual capstone research and analysis, will be a prospective statement of how you currently plan to execute your capstone project, not a retrospective review of work you've already done.

The presentation should take about 15 minutes, followed by 15 minutes of questions and answers with the rest of class and instructor. Each team member should have a speaking role. Given the time frame, you should prepare no more than 8 to 10 slides; please provide a hard copy of the slides to the instructor. You will also be evaluated on how effectively you engage the other groups who will also be presenting their proposals.

### ***Research Review & Synopsis of Next Steps (Team)***

In Week 7 of the course, teams will turn in a brief summary of their research to date, prepared in accordance with the instructions on Blackboard. The deliverable should also include the final version of the team's research puzzle and questions, a brief status report on data collection and analysis activities, and a short synopsis of the remaining work to be done. The synopsis of next steps should be comprehensive but concise, and less than a single page (bullet format is fine). The research review and synopsis should demonstrate that the team has a credible plan for successfully completing its project within the coming weeks. If it appears that mid-semester corrections are needed, now is that time to address them directly and decisively.

### ***Draft High-Level Report Outline (Team)***

In Week 11, teams will turn in a draft outline of their final report. The outline should show all sections (and subsections) of the report and provide sufficient detail to allow the instructor (and the team) to visualize the structure of the final report. Teams that treat this as a pro forma compliance exercise may earn full points but, by not deeply engaging the assignment, will not get much from it. Students should view this assignment as an opportunity to draw up the blueprints for the final report, thereby ensuring that all relevant material is included and is stitched together in an intellectually coherent narrative. Two pages should be enough for your outline; do not exceed three pages. I will provide comments the following week.

### ***Peer Reviews (Individual)***

Twice during the semester, each student will provide feedback about the work of their team members. Please rate each of your team members and yourself on a scale of 0-4, with 4 being excellent teamwork and 0 being a complete failure to contribute to the group's work. You may rate a team member 2 or below, only after you have raised the specific issue(s) with them personally. Any rating of 2 or below must be accompanied by an explanation of the issue(s) and what you did to try to resolve it. In addition, please identify one particular strength of each team member, including yourself, that has significantly facilitated the team's work.

Teamwork is critical to capstone success. Accordingly, 50 (out of 1,000) points will reflect your individual effort in being a good team member. Students who, in the eyes of their teammates and instructor, make a meaningful contribution to the team's work over the course of the semester will earn full points. Conversely, if a team member repeatedly fails to contribute meaningfully to his/her group's work, as reported by multiple team members or observed by the instructor, then he or she will have their teamwork score decremented accordingly.

### ***Draft and Final Report (Team)***

Guidelines for the structure, content, length, and format of your final capstone project report are posted on Blackboard.

### ***Expo Poster & Presentation (Team)***

At the end of the semester, each TSPPPA capstone team presents its project during an on-campus event (known as the Capstone Expo). The process entails creating a large poster (approximately 3' x 5') that uses words and graphics to depict the entirety of the project. The posters are on display for about an hour and a half, with students, alumni, and faculty (but not clients) circulating among the posters. All team members are expected to be present at the Expo to explain their project and answer questions of passers-by.

A draft of the poster should first be provided to the instructor for review and comment, with the final version delivered to Gregory Nelson by the end of the following week so that it can be reproduced at full size.

### ***Client Presentation (Team)***

Each team will make a formal oral presentation of their work to their client (with their GW instructor in attendance). Typically, such presentations last about 20 minutes, followed by up to 20 minutes of questions, answers, and discussion. All team members should have a speaking role. Condensing your project to fit the available time will require focusing on the most important elements and findings, rather than attempting to communicate every detail. In the absence of direct instructions from the client, presentations should include the following:

- (1) The identity of the client
- (2) Project objectives, central research questions, importance to client
- (3) Any relevant insights and highlights from the literature review
- (4) A brief explanation of the methodology
- (5) A short summary of any challenges and how they were addressed
- (6) Findings and lessons learned, expected and unexpected
- (7) Next steps and recommendations to the client

The presentation is scheduled a couple of weeks before the final report, to allow you the opportunity to incorporate client feedback in the final report. Please remind your client early in the semester that the presentation is not the final step in the project. If the client really wants

the presentation done after the report is finished, we can accommodate that, but doing so will require adjusting some parts of the end-of semester schedule. If you end up in this situation, let me know and we can work things out. I will endeavor to attend all client presentations, but with eight presentations scheduled in a short period of time, doing so may be infeasible. Please try to schedule your client presentation at least three weeks in advance.

I will use two basic criteria to evaluate your presentation to the client:

- Style: Aim for an engrossing, lively, focused talk, supplemented with uncluttered, attractive, informative visual aids
- Substance: Present a tightly edited, logically developed, effectively analyzed, and convincingly argued report of the research

History suggests that you will need to practice your presentation several times. You may want to record one of your practice sessions and review it as a group. You should brainstorm the types of questions you might be asked; prepare succinct and cogent answers to such questions.

### **COURSE EFFORT**

This course will require approximately 150 hours of effort over the semester. We will meet 5 times for 2 hours (10 hours) and 3 times for 0.5 hours (1.5 hours). Two hours each will be spent on the client presentation and on the expo event, for a total of 16 hours of specifically committed time. The remaining 134 hours will be allocated across research work, group meetings, report preparation, presentation practice, and discussions with your client, based on the specific needs of your particular project.

### **ACKNOWLEDGING HISTORICAL REALITIES ABOUT GW**

#### GW & Native American Lands

“George Washington University's Foggy Bottom Campus in downtown Washington, D.C. ... resides on the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Piscataway and Anacostan peoples. ... The District borders the confluence of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, a historic center of trade and cultural exchange between several tribal nations. For generations, the Piscataway and Anacostan Peoples have resided in this region and served as stewards of the local land and waterways” ([cipp.cps.gwu.edu/land-acknowledgement](http://cipp.cps.gwu.edu/land-acknowledgement)).

#### GW & Slavery

“Although additional work remains to be done, initial research into Columbian College [GW's predecessor] clearly shows that the practice of slavery influenced the school from the president down to enslaved servants. The college was located in a slave-owning city, financed and led by slave owners and men who profited from the slave economy, educated pro-slavery students, and depended on the labor of enslaved people” ([library.gwu.edu/slavery-columbian-college](http://library.gwu.edu/slavery-columbian-college)).

#### GW & Integration

Cloyd Heck Marvin was President of GW from 1927 to 1959 and a segregationist who resisted integration at GW. The University refused to admit black students until after the 1954 Brown v Board of Education decision and was the last university in DC to do so. By one account, dormitories at GW remained segregated until 1961 (Novak, 2012).

## WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT YOU DURING THE SEMESTER?

- ❖ Students with Disabilities: If you know you will need accommodation due to a disability, let me know in the first week of the class. The [Disability Support Services](#) office will establish eligibility and coordinate reasonable accommodations.
- ❖ Sustaining Class Engagement: I recognize that formally documented disabilities are not the only impediments to learning. If, during the semester, a situation arises that impedes your meaningful participation in the class, please let me know so that we can work out a suitable solution.
- ❖ English for Academic Purposes Writing Support Program: If English is not your first language, or if you're having trouble adapting your writing style to meet course requirements, you can take advantage of GW's Writing Support [Program](#) which offers free, one on one service.
- ❖ Support: [GW Mental Health Services](#) (202-994-5300) offers 24/7 assistance to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills concerns, including crisis and emergency mental health consultations, confidential assessment, counseling services, and referrals to other providers.

## WHAT NORMS WILL GUIDE THE CLASS?

- ❖ Civility: Higher education works best when it is a vigorous and lively marketplace of ideas where all points of view are heard. Free expression is an integral part of this process. Higher education also demands that all of us approach the enterprise with empathy and respect for others, irrespective of their ideology, political views, or identity. Listen to understand others, not to judge them.
- ❖ DEI: In both our substantive project work, and in our interactions with fellow students, clients, and project stakeholders, we aspire to apply a lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We will seek first to understand and appreciate the lived conditions of those we encounter before we ask them to understand our point of view or support our research project.
- ❖ Class Decorum: Texting, checking your phone, or using your laptop for anything other than participating in class activities or notetaking is inappropriate. Those who do these things may think their actions are unobtrusive, but they are actually quite conspicuous. It's distracting, both to me and to your classmates, and will result in a significant decrease in your class engagement grade.

## WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE CLASS?

- ❖ Recording of Class Sessions: Unless GW changes its policy during the semester, all classes will be conducted in person, rather than virtually. In other words, classes will not be available in real time through Zoom or a similar platform. The four class meetings with a traditional lecture/discussion format will be recorded (Weeks 1, 2, 3, and 13) so that if you do need to miss class, you can watch the recording (available on Blackboard) to see what you missed.
- ❖ Blackboard: I will use Blackboard to communicate with students. Be sure to regularly check for announcements, new readings, and other important information. If needed, contact the Helpdesk at 202-994-5530 or [helpdesk.gwu.edu](mailto:helpdesk.gwu.edu).
- ❖ Intellectual Property: Lecture slides and course materials (e.g., readings, exercises) are for your personal use. Please don't distribute them to others (e.g., you may not download files from Blackboard and then post them to another site, like CourseHero).
- ❖ Academic Honesty: All work in this class is to be completed in conformance with the George Washington University [Code](#) of Academic Integrity.



- ❖ **AI Tools:** You may make limited use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools (such ChatGPT or Google Bard) during your project. If you use AI tools, their use must be described in your final report. You may use AI tools for ideation and brainstorming (e.g., to come up with research questions or to surface issues related to your topic that you may have overlooked). You may not use AI tools to originate specific text for course assignments. Bear in mind that AI tools sometimes generate false or misleading results; you are responsible for verifying the accuracy of any AI outputs you use.
- ❖ **Grading:** No grade changes can be made after the conclusion of the semester, except for clerical error. If you can't finish the class and want to take an "incomplete," you must talk to me *before* the last day of class. Consult the TSPPPA Student Handbook for the relevant CCAS policy. Letter grades (and the associated point score) will be assigned as follows:
  - **A Excellent** (930-1000 points): Exceptional work for a graduate student. Work is unusually thorough, well-reasoned, creative, methodologically sophisticated, and well written. Work is of exceptional, professional quality.
  - **A- Very Good** (900-929 points): Very strong work for a graduate student. Shows signs of creativity and a strong understanding of appropriate analytical approaches, is thorough and well-reasoned, and meets professional standards.
  - **B+ Good** (870-899 points): Sound work for a graduate student; well-reasoned and thorough, without serious analytical shortcomings. Indicates the student has fully accomplished the basic objectives of this graduate course.
  - **B Adequate** (830-869 points): Competent work for a graduate student with some evident weaknesses. Demonstrates competency in the key course objectives but the understanding or application of some important issues is less than complete.
  - **B- Borderline**: (780-829 points) Weak work for a graduate student but meets minimal expectations. Understanding of key issues is incomplete. (Note that a B- average in all courses is not sufficient to sustain 'good standing.')
  - **C Deficient** (700-779 points): Inadequate work for a graduate student; rarely meets minimal expectations. Work is poorly developed or flawed by numerous errors and misunderstandings of important issues.
  - **F Unacceptable** (<700 points): Work fails to meet minimal expectations or course credit for a graduate student. Performance has consistently failed to meet minimum course requirements. Weaknesses and limitations are pervasive.
- ❖ **Syllabus:** This syllabus is only a guide to the course. Sound educational practice requires flexibility, and the instructor may revise content and requirements during the semester.

### Schedule at a Glance

<b>Week</b>	<b>Dates (Tu/W)</b>	<b>Class Content</b>	<b>Due (in class, or if no class, at 6pm by email)</b>
1	Jan 16/17	Team status reports, Mis-en-place, Metacognition, Teamwork (Readings on Blackboard)	--
2	Jan 23/24	Designing Policy Analysis Projects – Part I: Research Puzzles & Research Questions (Readings on Blackboard)	Team Charter CITI Certifications
3	Jan 30/31	Designing Policy Analysis Projects – Part II: Data Collection, Methodology, Limitations (Readings on Blackboard)	Draft Attachment A & Proposed Edits to Agreement (before being sent to client)
4	Feb 6/7	Project presentations by each group (class will extend to 910pm)	Agreement signed by Client; Presentation Slide Deck
5	Feb 13/14	No Class	--
6	Feb 20/21	Consultation with instructor about project (30 minutes/group)	--
7	Feb 27/28	No Class	Research Review & Synopsis of Next Steps; Peer Review #1
8	Mar 5/6	Consultation with instructor about project (30 minutes/group)	--
9	--	No Class – GW Spring Break	--
10	Mar 19/20	Mid-Semester Review (Whole class workshop/brainstorm)	No readings/deliverables, prep to discuss project challenges
11	Mar 26/27	No Class	Draft High-Level Report Outline
12	Apr 2/3	Consultation with instructor about project (30 minutes/group)	--
13	Apr 9/10	Communicating Results of Policy Analysis (Readings on Blackboard)	--
14	Apr 16/17	No Class	Draft Poster; Draft Presentation Slide Deck
15	Apr 23/24	No Class; Presentation to Client <sup>1</sup> (with Instructor) to be scheduled between 4/25 & 5/2	Final Poster to Gregory (Fri, 4/26) Draft Report (for instructor, not client)
16	Apr 30/ May 1	No Class	Capstone Poster Expo (Fri, 5/3)
17	May 7/8	No Class	Final Report to Instructor & Client; Peer Review #2

<sup>1</sup> Presentations must be scheduled at least 3 weeks in advance, in consultation with instructor and client. If you need to reserve an on-campus room in which to host your client, be sure to consult Gregory well in advance.