

**MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM**  
**GEORGIA COLLEGE**  
**PUAD 6700 CAPSTONE PROJECT**  
*Revised, May 2020*

**Dr. Min Kim**

**E-mail: [min.kim@gcsu.edu](mailto:min.kim@gcsu.edu)**

**Office Phone: 478-445-4562**

**Course Description**

The Capstone Project offers each student the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of the theory and practice of public administration by applying the knowledge and skills gained in the MPA program to a project of the student's choice. This involves completing a project report reflecting the cumulative knowledge gained from these experiences. The course is intended only for students who are completing their Masters of Public Administration (MPA). The course prerequisite is PUAD 6606 (Research Methods) or its equivalent, the completion of 27 hours in the MPA program, and Program permission.

**Course Objectives**

- To demonstrate knowledge gained throughout the MPA program and to apply that knowledge to a relevant public management, nonprofit management, or policy problem.
- To produce a report that demonstrates critical thought, exhibits a level of analysis appropriate to a master's degree, and displays a high level of professionalism and competence in presentation.
- To assess the effectiveness of the MPA program in achieving its mission, goals and objectives. The project must involve a real agency or organization in a real locality.

**Capstone Topic Specifications**

- It should be possible for the student to frame the project in a question that might be asked by the official involved, and the project should produce a response to the question.
- The analysis must be based on real information or data relating to the agency or organization in the locality involved.
- The sources of the information or data must be cited. If the information or data is unpublished, such as information provided based on an interview or information request, the student must make the information available to the faculty member for the section involved.

- Students may create original information or data by gathering it. For example, the student could conduct interviews or measure distances or rate attributes of locations, or the student could construct estimates of information based on comparable jurisdictions. The primary report must explain how the information is developed.
- The project must be at a scale that one person with the skills of an MPA student, working alone, could complete in several weeks. For example, the elimination of the national debt or the reversal of global warming are projects out of scale for this assignment. Generally, projects, issues and programs that would be encountered in a local government in a specific agency or local organization are preferable.
- The student must understand the data and the techniques of analysis involved. For example, comparing methods used to assess the presence of water on Mars would be beyond the capability of most MPA students based on what the student has studied.

### **Possible Project Approaches**

- Case study
- Action research
- Program evaluation
- Management analysis study
- Policy analysis study
- Work process analysis/process improvement
- Organizational analysis
- Strategic plan

### **Possible Project Techniques/Methodologies**

- Surveys
- Content analysis
- Interviewing
- Cost/benefit analysis
- Focus groups
- Performance measurement
- Forecasting
- Observation
- Quantitative data analysis

### **Project Outline**

Regardless of the project approach and methodology used, the final project should explicitly apply concepts drawn from MPA course work, reading and practice that aid in understanding the political, social, economic, managerial other factors relevant to the

context and issues of the project. The outcome should be improved understanding of professional practice in a public or non-profit organization or program. The project may also result in recommendations for action that could change an organization or program.

All materials will be transmitted to the professor electronically in attached files readable by Word. Format will be Times New Roman 12 point font, single-spaced. Receipt will be acknowledged within 24 hours.

Each student's final product will be a report divided into **seven sections** as described below.

1. **Executive Summary:** Written when all other sections of the report are completed, this section provides the reader an overview of sections of the paper below.
2. **Introduction:** Describes the issue studied, including its development over time and the political and organizational context (or other relevant context such as public health). Describes the relevance or significance of the issue, problem, or project. Presents a concise and clear statement of the research question, as well as the likely outcome(s) of not addressing the issue/problem.
3. **Analytic Framework/Literature Review:** Presents a full and balanced review of theoretical and practice-oriented concepts drawn from the appropriate scholarly and professional literature, comparing and contrasting different perspectives and analyzing their application to the research question. This is sometimes referred to as the "literature review." The purpose of a review of previous research and various theoretical approaches to a topic is to develop an analytic framework that establishes the elements of the project, lays out the theoretical basis of the project, and integrates the project into the larger body of systematic knowledge about public management and public policy. The References section (see #7 below) should be turned in at the same time as this section. Please remember, this section is not simply a summary of scholarship related to your research question, rather it is meant to help you frame your research question, identify shortcoming in the existing research and serve as a guide for your methodological approach.
4. **Methodology:** Articulates specific research questions/hypotheses and describes the research methodology, such as selection of persons interviewed, use of survey techniques, or data analysis. Carefully describes the specific steps taken to ensure the validity of the research design or project methodology and the credibility and utility of the research results.
5. **Findings:** Describes findings relative to the hypotheses or research questions with analysis and interpretation of the data or evidence collected.
6. **Conclusion:** Discusses the potential impact of the research on practice and the public interest. Relates the findings to previous research and existing theory and practice. Identifies shortcoming in research design and identifies areas for future research (if resources or time weren't issues, what would be an ideal research

design). Presents implications and recommendations derived from the findings as appropriate.

7. **References:** A complete and accurate list of references must be included, in the style of the American Psychological Association Publication Manual.
8. **Tables:** A departure from the style guide will be that all tables, figures and graphics should be included in the body of the report as close as possible to the text discussion of the item. Please also make sure that you reference the tables in the text.
9. **Appendices:** Appendices may be used to include lengthy and detailed material not directly discussed in the body of the report. This might include material such as transcripts of in-depth interviews, frequency distributions of survey items, and special computations related to the project (e.g., details of a benefit/cost analysis). When submitting each section, please submit all prior sections so that I may examine the continuity among the sections.

### **Selected Resource Materials**

- Howard S. Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book or Article*, The University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Chris Hart, *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Research Imagination*, Sage Publications, 1998.
- Terry E. Hedrick, Leonard Bickman, & Debra J. Rog, *Applied Research Design: A Practical Guide*, Sage Publications, 1993.
- Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, eighth edition, Wadsworth Publications, Inc., 1998.
- Chava Frankfort Nachmias and David Nachmias, *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, fifth edition, St. Martin's Press, 1996.
- Joseph S. Wholey, Harry P. Hatry, and Kathryn E. Newcomer (Eds.), *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*, Jossey-Bass, 1994.
- John Brewer & Albert Hunter, *Multimethod Research: A Synthesis of Styles* Sage, 1989.
- Glen H. Elder, Jr., Eliza A. Pavalko and Elizabeth Colerick Clipp, *Working with Archival Data*, Sage, 1993.
- Gudmund R. Iversen, *Contextual Analysis*, Sage, 1991.
- Jordon J. Louviere, *Analyzing Decision-Making*, Sage, 1984.
- Jean M. Converse and Stanley Presser, *Survey Questions*, Sage, 1986.
- Kazuo Yamaguchi, *Event History Analysis*, Sage, 1991.
- Arlene Fink, *Conducting Research Literature Reviews*, Sage, 1998.
- Arlene Fink and Jacqueline Kosecoff, *How to Conduct Surveys*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Sage, 1998.
- Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Sage, 1994.

### **Evaluation**

The class will be graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis. Each student will complete a written report of their project and will make an oral presentation of the project to the MPA faculty. Participation at all sessions is required. Timely completion of each assignment according to the course schedule listed below is required for the student to continue on to the next phase of the project. Students who fall behind in the course or whose work is not deemed to be sufficiently completed at each stage may be asked to withdraw at the professor's discretion. If major deficiencies are noted that would require re-doing major portions of the project or paper, and the work is assessed as not meeting the expectations necessary to achieve a passing grade, unsatisfactory grade (U) will be assigned, and the student must re-enroll in the course at a later time. Students who are unable to complete their project, but have been both timely and maintained good-faith efforts to complete each phase of their project, may be approved by the professor to receive a grade of "IP" (in progress) at the end of the semester to postpone completion and grading until a subsequent semester. If a student receives an "IP" in the course, the student will be permitted to informally attend and complete the capstone project one more time, and resubmit the capstone project to a subsequent class section. If the student does not complete the course on the second attempt within one year following the end of the semester when the "U (Unsatisfactory)" was assigned, the student will not be permitted to take the course again and will be dismissed from the program due to failure to complete the capstone requirement on timely basis.

### **Course Procedures and Expectations**

In accordance with policy established by the MPA Committee, the Capstone Project course has three mandatory meetings: (1) an initial orientation session early in the semester, (2) a milestone meeting in the middle of the term at a date specified by the professor and (3) the final session at which students present their projects. Each student will work independently, and since the project is intended to represent the culmination of the student's work in the MPA program, each student will be responsible for designing and conducting all aspects of the project.

During the semester the professor will be available as a coach, mentor, and resource person. In particular, the professor will review a written draft of each principal section of the student's report and provide detailed comments and suggestions to the student. Once the professor reviews a given draft section of the report, the student should use the comments and suggestions in the development and preparation of the final report. The professor will generally not review and comment on a student's completed revision of a given section; it is the student's responsibility to make appropriate revisions and to integrate each section into a final written report.

The student is expected to conduct research that meets professional standards for quality and validity. The report is expected to meet professional standards for writing

and style. The oral report may be presented using software such as PowerPoint, and will last approximately 10-15 minutes. Detailed instructions will be provided later in the semester.

Because of the independent nature of the capstone project, much communication between students and the professor will be by e-mail or telephone. Draft sections for review should be sent to the professor by virus-free e-mail attachment in Word format to the address given at the top of the syllabus, by the date and time indicated on the course schedule listed below. Students may also discuss their project in a telephone call with the professor or may arrange an appointment at a mutually convenient time.

### **Making Capstone Papers Available to Future Students**

The Program has decided that we will be retaining successfully completed Capstone projects for review, upon request, by future students in the MPA Program. We realize that in some cases these projects can deal with sensitive material and, therefore, we ask that you notify the instructor if you prefer that your Capstone project not be shared.

### **Attention**

An GC Institutional Review Board (IRB) (<https://irb-portal.gcsu.edu>) must review all research involving the collection of qualitative or quantitative data from human subjects, even historical data. Participation in this process is required of all MPA students, regardless of the type of research proposed. Prior to completing an IRB application, all MPA students must complete an IRB training module. Your Capstone Advisor will serve as the principal investigator (PI) on the IRB application. Data collection cannot begin until you have obtained IRB approval; this includes administering surveys, conducting focus groups, etc. Please check out the "Tips to get your project approved" guidance on the right side of GC IRB portal page.