1. Purpose
The Capstone is designed to provide students with the opportunity to integrate and synthesize what they have learned during the entire MPA course of study. It also provides a process and structure for SPA faculty to determine whether MPA graduates have attained the goals of the MPA program: knowledge of public administration or nonprofit theory, research, and practice; critical thinking skills; and written and oral communication skills. The capstone project requires students to demonstrate knowledge of the concepts and principles conveyed in the MPA curriculum and to apply that knowledge to study a problem confronted by a public or nonprofit sector agency. The written and oral products of this Capstone provide tangible evidence of a degree candidate’s qualifications and expertise.

In the capstone course, students undertake a client-based project. This project is intended to meet the information needs of a client or agency while also demonstrating and using knowledge and skills students have obtained in the MPA program.

A client-based project must:
- be undertaken for a client who is affiliated with a public or non-profit agency or organization;
- be of significance and practical use to the client organization; and
- be based on scholarly literature in public administration or nonprofit management.

To illustrate, a project may concern a management issue, such as an aspect of human resources management, financial analysis, or reorganization, or a policy or program issue, for example, an evaluation of an agency program, the planning and development of a new program, or the modification of an existing program.

2. Prerequisites
a. The capstone course should be taken in the student’s last semester of classes before completing the MPA, though students will be oriented to the capstone and should identify their client and topic prior to the beginning of the semester;
b. Although a student may take another elective at the same time as 5361, taking more than one additional course is strongly discouraged because of the work required in the capstone;
c. All core courses should have been completed before taking the capstone course. Under exceptional circumstances a student may request that the instructor allow one final core course to be taken concurrently with 5361. Since the capstone project generally includes a research component, that course may not be PUAD 5003: Research and Analytic Methods. If a core course is taken concurrently with PUAD 5361, the capstone project must not concern an issue addressed in the concurrent core course.

3. Selecting a Project
Students may find a client in many ways. The most common routes are these:
- SPA keeps a list of potential clients and their projects for students to contact on its job portal;
- Students may approach an agency or contact person, meet with them and describe the capstone course, and determine if the agency and/or contact person has a project or problem they would like the student to address.

Client-based projects may NOT be conducted as part of ongoing work responsibilities; however, students may conduct a project for an organization that employs them if that project is outside of their official responsibilities and the client does not have supervisory authority over the student.
Students completing a concentration must pursue a project that is related to their concentration area. Further, either their first or second reader must be a faculty member in the area of the concentration.

4. Course Format and Committee
The capstone course is guided by a primary instructor, the first reader. That instructor’s role is to guide the student in selecting a project and specifying its scope, to assist the student as needed in conducting the project, and to provide extensive feedback to the student on various drafts of the project. In order to provide students with the individual attention needed, capstone courses are restricted to no more than 20 students per class. Students may be moved to different sections to accommodate this class size requirement.

Work under the capstone is guided by a committee comprised of three persons: the first reader (course instructor), a second reader (SPA faculty member), and a third reader (client or substantive expert). All three readers must ultimately approve the project prospectus. All will help the student with the project and will evaluate the final report and presentation, though the first reader serves as the student’s primary guide.

The Second Reader
The second reader should be a fulltime faculty or staff member at SPA. If a student has declared a concentration, the first or second reader must be a faculty member from that concentration area.

If a full-time faculty member with subject-matter expertise is not available, students may select a SPA adjunct faculty member with subject-matter expertise in the area of the project with the approval of the primary instructor. On the UCCS campus, the second reader can be a CU faculty member outside of SPA.

Second readers should be selected because they have expertise in the content area of the project. Students should consult with them early in the process to get recommendations for references to form the foundation of the client-based project and/or suggestions concerning target journals and references for research projects.

The Third Reader
The third reader is the client, i.e., the representative of the organization for which you are conducting the project.

Role of Readers
While the first reader will have the primary responsibility for supervising the student’s project, the second and third readers have responsibility for: (1) approving the student’s project prospectus, (2) commenting on project drafts and approving the final project report, (3) attending and participating in the oral presentation of the project, and (4) evaluating the student’s work. Additionally, the third reader serves to link the student with the client organization and reports on the utility and professionalism of the student’s work for and with the organization.

The first reader determines the student’s grade, but will seek input from other readers to determine the final grade. (See attached rubric used by all readers to assess the project.)

5. Steps to the Project
No incompletes
The student must be able to complete the selected project by the end of the semester. An incomplete grade will be issued only under very exceptional circumstances.

Orientation
All students are required to participate in the orientation session for 5361 the semester before they plan to enroll. These sessions normally occur about one month before the end of the previous semester. Orientation information will be sent to students taking the online degree and the instructor for the online course will be
available to answer their questions. All students who are eligible for taking the capstone are contacted by the student services staff to attend or participate in this orientation.

The orientation prepares students to identify a project and client, as appropriate, and to develop a prospectus in preparation for the beginning of the course.

**Preparing for the Beginning of Class**
The orientation provides students with information about how to begin their projects. Before the beginning of the semester, students must identify a client and define their topic for the client. Students are encouraged to contact the person who is likely to be their professor for the capstone to let him or her know of their topic and receive assistance in focusing the topic. Students are also encouraged to contact potential second and/or third readers during this time to get advice on a focus and references to explore. *The prospectus for the project is generally due the second week of the semester, so students must undertake some work before the semester begins to be able to complete the prospectus and begin the project.*

**Prospectus: Week Two**
Students will submit a prospectus which describes the goals of their project, presents the specific questions they hope to answer, identifies the client and agency for which the project will be conducted, identifies the relevant literature and expected methods of inquiry. Finally, the prospectus names the faculty member(s) and client who have agreed to serve as second and third readers. Individual instructors in the capstone may have additional requirements or slight variations on their requirements for the prospectus.

*Instructors may advise students who have not submitted an acceptable proposal to drop the course.* This action must be taken before the official add-drop date, so students can drop the course without penalty. Students who are told to drop the course and to re-enroll the next semester will be given specific feedback and instructions from the primary instructor to allow them to begin the capstone more productively the following semester.

**Drafts**
The capstone report is unlike a traditional term paper in many ways. One way in which it differs is that students submit several drafts and revise those drafts, often extensively, based on feedback from their primary instructor and other readers. The primary instructor will provide students with their expectations and due dates for drafts. Typically, students submit at least two drafts with one coming mid-way through the course and constituting the first part of the paper.

Students should check with their second and third readers at each draft to learn whether they prefer to receive the draft after the primary instructor has made suggestions and the student has revised or to receive it at the same time as the primary instructor. Some faculty members prefer to receive the paper after the primary instructor has provided feedback concerning the organization and substance of the paper. However, this delay can require them to read the paper quickly and get feedback to the student. On final drafts, the timeline can become particularly tight, so the student should work closely with the primary faculty member and communicate with second and third readers to establish a time frame for this stage.

Papers should be no longer than 25 double-spaced pages, excluding references, attachments, and figures. Instructors may provide more specific guidelines.

**Final Report**
Having received feedback from all readers, students should revise their final draft and distribute it to all readers at least one week before the oral presentation. In some cases, instructors may choose to have reports completed after the oral presentation based on feedback from the oral conference. Students will learn the specific details of due dates from their individual instructor’s syllabus.
Oral Presentation

Students are expected to make a professional oral presentation, including supportive visual materials such as PowerPoint, overheads, or handouts. Oral presentation sessions typically last around one hour, though the actual presentation is limited to 12-15 minutes. Since readers have read the paper, the student may choose to focus on particular issues of interest or to summarize key points. The remainder of the hour is used for questions and discussion. Students are strongly encouraged to practice the presentation to ensure they are organized and are able to convey all the information they desire within the time limit. Oral presentations are a part of the student’s final grade.

To schedule the presentation, students should select 3-5 potential dates and times and send them electronically to all readers to identify a time when all can participate. Second and third readers are required to be in attendance, but may participate electronically if circumstances prohibit their actual presence. Once a date and time are identified, students should submit an electronic scheduling form to the Student Services staff to obtain a room and any equipment for the presentation, and then notify the readers of the location. The capstone presentation scheduling form is available at: http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/SPA/CurrentStudents/CapstoneSeminar/Pages/form.aspx. Students who live outside the Denver metro area will arrange an oral presentation making use of software or telecommunications technology. (Distance students may, and occasionally do, choose to come to Denver for the final presentation, but that is not required.)

6. Other Key Issues

Grounding the Project in the Scholarly Public Administration Literature

All capstone projects include a review of the scholarly literature relevant to the project. The actions undertaken in the project should be grounded in the scholarly literature. It is expected that the student will have reviewed prominent refereed journals in the field and relevant to the chosen project, such as Public Administration Review, American Review of Public Administration, Review of Public Personnel Administration, Public Performance & Management Review, Public Integrity, Administration & Society, Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, Public Budgeting and Finance, Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, Academy of Management Review, and International Journal of Public Management.

Collecting and Analyzing Information

It is expected that the student will support project conclusions with evidence from qualitative or quantitative data. Students may use secondary data or generate primary data.

At this time, the UCD Human Subjects Research Committee Institutional Review Board (HSRC/IRB) has concluded that projects intended for use within an organization do not require their review. However, if a student is collecting original data from a group typically considered as a protected class by IRB, the faculty member will review the project to insure human subject protections are being considered.

On the Colorado Springs campus, IRB approval may be required if any research data are collected from people. Students on that campus should consult their instructor to determine if IRB approval is needed.
Writing and Format
The capstone report demonstrates a student’s ability to communicate information, including scholarly information, in a professional manner. As noted above, students will complete several drafts and should anticipate substantive work on revisions at each stage. Students are required to use a standard writing format such as APA or Chicago styles.

Supplemental Documentation
All projects, regardless of the type, must draw upon at least three courses the student has completed in the MPA program. In addition to the project report, students will submit a brief document that describes how the knowledge and skills gained from the designated MPA courses were used to complete the project. At least one of these three courses must be a core course, and, if the student is completing a concentration, at least one must be a concentration course.

Project Assessment
The faculty of SPA evaluates the final capstone based on a rubric. This rubric is meant to assess achievement of the following knowledge of public affairs, critical thinking, writing, and oral communication. Moreover, the rubric will inform attainment of the following competencies: To lead and manage in public governance; to participate in the policy process; to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions; to articulate and apply a public service perspective; and to communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.

Readers will use a rubric to report on their judgment of the student’s performance in each relevant area. The primary instructor will, then, determine the grade based on readers’ feedback.

Any Questions?
Contact the instructor of your capstone course. Feel free to be in touch with us as you move through the process.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Measure</th>
<th>Below Proficient</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Above Proficient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifies the main public or nonprofit sector problem addressed by the paper.</td>
<td>Fails to identify, summarize, or explain the main problem or question; or does so insufficiently. Represents the issues inaccurately or inappropriately.</td>
<td>Successfully identifies and summarizes the main problem, and explains it clearly.</td>
<td>Does an outstanding job of identifying and summarizing the main problem in an innovative way, and explains it clearly. Identifies important secondary issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies the key management and/or policy concepts connected with the main problem.</td>
<td>Fails to identify, summarize, or explain important concepts; or does so inadequately. Unable to connect concepts to the main problem.</td>
<td>Successfully identifies and explains the key concepts, and adequately connects them to the main problem.</td>
<td>Exhaustively identifies and explains the key concepts, and succinctly and analytically connects them to the main problem. Identifies, explains, and connects relevant secondary concepts to the main problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of scholarly public affairs (PA) literature relevant to the subject.</td>
<td>Demonstrates little knowledge of existing relevant literature. Key authors/scholars are not identified. Theory and research are used incorrectly or insufficiently.</td>
<td>Describes the literature well based on appropriate reference to at least ten scholarly articles or books relevant to the subject. Identifies relevant theory, research, and practice; and applies it correctly to the project.</td>
<td>Also demonstrates a sophisticated knowledge of PA research literature. Makes innovative applications of the literature to the project in question. Identifies literature that is pertinent and informative for conducting the project.</td>
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## The student’s demonstration of critical thinking skills

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<tr>
<th>Performance Measure</th>
<th>Below Proficient</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Above Proficient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identifies and considers the influence of the context (i.e., political, social, economic, etc.) on the main problem.</strong></td>
<td>Does not identify or consider any contextual issues. Or does not explain contextual issues; provides inaccurate information; or merely provides a list.</td>
<td>Accurately identifies and provides an explanation of potential contextual issues.</td>
<td>Accurately identifies and provides a well developed explanation of contextual issues with a clear sense of scope.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identifies and assesses the quality of relevant existing literature/evidence.</strong></td>
<td>Does not identify or assess relevant evidence. Or merely repeats information provided by existing evidence, but does not assess its quality.</td>
<td>Examines evidence and assesses its quality.</td>
<td>Provides a well-developed critical examination of the evidence its accuracy, relevance, and completeness. Clearly distinguishes between fact and opinion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method assessment and appropriateness, including limitations of the method used to conduct the research.</strong></td>
<td>Assessment is brief and/or unclear. Methods are not adequate or barely adequate to address the research problem. Barely adequate description of the limitations of the research. Some possible limitations are not included.</td>
<td>Assessment is generally thorough and clear description. Methods are appropriate to address the research problem. Clear description and understanding of the limitations of the methods.</td>
<td>Exceptionally thorough, systematic, and clear description of method. Methods are entirely appropriate to address the research problems. Multiple methods are employed. Exceptionally clear and insightful (i.e., provides implications for future research) description of the limitations of the methods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding results and balancing evidence to reach valid conclusions and recommendations.</strong></td>
<td>Recommendations and conclusions are only partially related, if at all, to the findings of the analysis and to existing evidence and literature. Conclusions are not supported by data.</td>
<td>Data collection, analysis, and interpretation are sound. Most of the recommendations and conclusions are derived properly from the findings of the analysis, and integrated with existing evidence and literature. Few, if any, findings are ignored.</td>
<td>Data collection, analysis, and interpretation are exhaustive. All of the findings are taken into account. The recommendations and conclusions are properly and intimately derived from both the results and existing evidence and literature. Expertly synthesizes student research with previous scholarly work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluates implications, conclusions, and consequences of the paper’s findings for public/nonprofit management and/or policy.</strong></td>
<td>Does not identify or evaluate any conclusions, implications or consequences. Or does not explain, provides inaccurate information, or merely provides a list of ideas.</td>
<td>Accurately identifies conclusions, implications, and consequences with a brief evaluative summary.</td>
<td>Accurately identifies conclusions, implications, and consequences with a well-developed explanation. Provides an objective reflection of own assertions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In relation to the Client</strong></td>
<td>The project and conclusions are inappropriate, irrelevant, or unhelpful to the client organization. Collaboration with client was minimal. Client needs are not considered or understood.</td>
<td>Project and conclusions are appropriate for the client organization. Project is useful. Works with client to decide question. Understands project in relation to client needs.</td>
<td>Conclusions have a high probability of improving the agency’s ability to serve the public. High level of collaboration with the client through all phases of the project. Intimate knowledge of how project meets client needs.</td>
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## The student’s demonstration of written communication skills

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<tr>
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<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Above Proficient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization and Style.</strong></td>
<td>Poorly written. Paper lacks organization and ideas are not stated clearly.</td>
<td>Sound and effective writing. Well organized and easy to follow. Ideas are clear.</td>
<td>Elegant and persuasive writing. The paper flows smoothly and logically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grammar and spelling.</strong></td>
<td>Work has an inappropriate number of misspellings or grammatical errors.</td>
<td>Work has a limited number of misspellings and/or grammatical errors.</td>
<td>Work has no misspellings or grammatical errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graphics and Visuals (when appropriate).</strong></td>
<td>Graphics/visuals are messy or poorly designed. Graphics/visuals are missing where they are clearly needed. Tables and charts lack sufficient information.</td>
<td>Graphics/visuals are adequate in scope, acceptably attractive, and easily viewed and related to the text.</td>
<td>Graphics/visuals are exceptionally attractive in terms of layout and design. Graphics/visuals are related to the text and sufficient in scope, making the material easier to understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publication style</strong></td>
<td>The paper does not follow an accepted publication style, e.g. APA, Chicago.</td>
<td>Follows an accepted citation style throughout the paper, including headings, tables, figures, etc.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing content</strong></td>
<td>Key points in the introduction, literature review, methods, results and conclusions are not communicated clearly.</td>
<td>Effectively summarizes theory, research, and practice from the literature. Clearly and completely explains methods used, and results/findings.</td>
<td>Also shows significant insight into the issues of concern. Is clearly organized with each section building on information presented in previous sections.</td>
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The student’s demonstration of oral communication skills

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<tr>
<th>Performance Measure</th>
<th>Below Proficient</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Above Proficient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Level.</td>
<td>Some opportunities for adjusting the presentation level for the audience have been missed. The audience’s attention is weak.</td>
<td>The audience’s knowledge level and interests have been considered. The audience’s attention has been maintained.</td>
<td>The audience’s interests are piqued and well considered. The audience’s attention has been drawn and engaged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction and Closing remarks.</td>
<td>Student does not display clear introductory and closing remarks.</td>
<td>Student displays clear introductory and closing remarks.</td>
<td>Student delivers open and closing remarks that capture the attention of the audience and set the mood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Mechanics.</td>
<td>The presentation materials are a bit messy or poorly designed. Many graphics are not clear, are not related to the topic, or are too small. Reads presentation from slides or notes.</td>
<td>The student can succinctly and clearly communicate the research question, method, findings, and interpretation. The presentation materials are acceptably attractive. Most graphics are easily viewed and relate to the topic.</td>
<td>The presentation materials are exceptionally attractive in terms of design, layout, and neatness. Graphics are easily viewed and are related to the topic, making the material easier to understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question and Answer.</td>
<td>Presenter has difficulty answering expected questions beyond a rudimentary level.</td>
<td>Presenter has sufficient knowledge of the material to answer expected questions.</td>
<td>Presenter demonstrates full knowledge of the material and can explain and elaborate on expected questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Detail.</td>
<td>Significant amounts of technical detail are lacking or inadequate so that the audience cannot appreciate the progress that has been made. In places, the information was too detailed or was lacking.</td>
<td>Sufficient technical detail is included to enable the audience to understand the nature of progress.</td>
<td>High level of relevant detail is presented to allow the audience to make judgments about the content. The details are not so elaborate that the presentation becomes tedious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client and instructor communications</td>
<td>Student was unable to understand client problems/needs. Unable or unwilling to effectively communicate with instructor/readers to enhance the paper.</td>
<td>Communicated effectively in order to understand client problems/needs. Communicated effectively with instructor and readers to understand requirements for the paper and feedback on drafts.</td>
<td>Shows ability to listen well and ask thoughtful, useful questions of both the client and the instructor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>