MIA/MPA SIPA Capstone Workshops
Faculty Advisor Handbook

Spring 2016

http://sipacapstone.wikischolars.columbia.edu/

COLUMBIA | SIPA
School of International and Public Affairs
www.sipa.columbia.edu

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RECOMMENDED WORKSHOP TIMELINE | SPRING 2016

July 31st	Preferred date for project proposals from new clients
September 16th	First draft of Terms of Reference (TOR) is due
September 30th	Final TOR must be submitted to SIPA
October 15th	Capstone project descriptions are posted on SIPA's website for students to view
October 29th- **5pm**	Deadline for students to apply to Capstone workshops
November 7th	Faculty submit their first round selection
November 12th	Faculty submit their selection from second round of applications
November 14th	Capstone team student assignments are announced. ***Teams must be announced prior to pre-registration***
December 1st	**Capstone Faculty Orientation** | Room 1512 IAB |5:00-6:30pm
Early December	Introductory Session by Faculty Advisor for student team to discuss the details of the project and assign winter reading/research. Time, date and location to be determined by Faculty Advisor. Contact Saleha Awal (sa3359@columbia.edu) to book a room.
December 10th	International Travel Meeting | Room 1501 IAB| 1:00- 2:00pm *For all students traveling international for the workshop*
January 19th	**First day of classes**
Week of January 19th *(or date that is convenient for the client)*	Client meets/conferences with Capstone team if they have not already met with team in early December
January 25th	Capstone Project Management Basics | Room 1501 IAB | 1:00-3:00pm
January 28th	International Travel Coordinator Meeting | Room 1510 IAB | 1:00-2:00pm
Before week of January 25th	*Suggested:* Complete Project Teambuilding Form and develop team Code of Conduct (available at http://sipacapstone.wikischolars.columbia.edu/Forms+%26+Handbooks)
January 31st	**Faculty must select a SIPA Liaison and notify** Capstone Program Coordinator, Saleha Awal (sa3359@columbia.edu)
Week of February 1st	*Suggested:* Complete Project Control Plan (available at http://sipacapstone.wikischolars.columbia.edu/Forms+%26+Handbooks)
February 2nd	**Interviewing Skills Session |** |Room 1501 IAB |1:00-3:00pm
February 3rd	**Orientation for SIPA Liaison** | Room 1512 IAB | 1:00-2:00pm
February 10th	Deadline to confirm availability for your team's midterm presentation timeslot.
Week of February 29th	Students complete first Peer Assessment Form
Week of February 29th	Deadline for SIPA Liaison to submit a 250-word abstract of Capstone project to be used for presentations. It is the responsibility of each team to bring supporting materials (i.e. PowerPoint, handouts, etc.) to the presentation via flash drive, email, DropBox, etc.)
March 3rd & 4th	**SIPA Capstone Midterm Presentations** | 15th Floor, IAB | 9:00am-5:00pm *Specific schedule will be sent out in early February*
Week of March 7th *(or date that is convenient for the client)*	Midterm briefing to client on project's progress
March 14th-18th	**Spring Break**—teams that are travelling internationally will travel during this week—no classes for all other workshops
Week of April 11th *(or date that is convenient for the client)*	Written draft report or initial findings submitted to client
April 21st	Deadline to submit prospectus for consideration to present at SIPA Capstone Closing Reception
Week of April 27th *(or date that is convenient for the client)*	Client briefing of Project findings
Before May 2nd	Final Report and briefing due to client
May 2nd	**Last Day of Classes**
Week of May 2nd	Students complete final Peer Assessment Form
Early May	**SIPA Capstone Closing Reception** | 15th floor, IAB | 4:00-5:30pm
May 13th	**Final deliverables and a 250-word abstract are due to SIPA.** **All Travel/Business expense reimbursement forms are due to SIPA.**
Week of May 13th	Client returns Client Feedback Form
May 18th	University Commencement
May 19th	SIPA Graduation
June 30th	Preferred date for Capstone Clients to request to continue for the following year

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Faculty Advisor Orientation Agenda
December 1st | 5:00-6:30pm
Room 1512 International Affairs Building (IAB) | 118th St. and Amsterdam

5:00-5:40pm— Welcome remarks from Associate Dean Dan McIntyre, self-introductions by Faculty Advisors including a brief synopsis of their individual workshop projects

5:40-5:50pm— Review of a few key points for arranging workshops—Suzanne Hollmann

- Arranging the initial meeting with the Capstone team during the fall semester
- Assigning a SIPA Liaison
- Capstone presentations at SIPA and the end of semester reception
- Tools available for managing team dynamics: Individual Roles, Peer Evaluation, Code of Conduct, Grading
- Evaluations—client, student and peer evaluations and grading rubric
- Project Renewal, request for help expanding our advisor/client pool

5:50-6:30pm — Faculty Advisors who have previously led several Capstone workshops will lead group discussion on topics including:

- Scope, shaping of projects
- Deliverables
- Managing client relationships
- Team-building and common team challenges
- Project management/ Weekly meetings
- Assessment/accountability for students
- Other topics in response to attendees

6:30-onwards—Reception - Light snacks and refreshments will be provided.

Overview of the Program

Capstone workshops serve as the culminating educational experience in the final semester for students in the Master of Public Administration (MPA) and Master of International Affairs (MIA) degree programs at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA). Workshops are organized as consulting projects in which a team of students (about six students per team), under the guidance of a workshop advisor, undertake a clearly defined project for an external client. There is a strong preference that all projects produce "actionable recommendations" that will be utilized by the client. The workshop advisor is a crucial component of the workshop. The advisor provides structure, analytical input, and practical guidance while monitoring the implementation of the workshop. The project addresses genuine as opposed to hypothetical questions or issues. The goal of the workshop is to present the client with a set of recommendations for solving the identified problem while at the same time requiring students to develop teamwork and project management skills, as well as deepen their substantive knowledge of the issue under consideration. Nearly all workshops occur during spring semester – during the current academic year, spring semester begins January 19th and ends May 2nd.

Deliverables

The project should include substantive research and analysis that lead to actionable recommendations that the client anticipates utilizing soon after the completion of the workshop. The specific substance and form of the report generated by each project is determined by the client and faculty advisor. In most circumstances, the student members of each workshop team will help to further refine the scope of the project as they develop their Project Control Plan; the client should be routinely updated and consulted with for any project decisions.

Each team should:

(1) Prepare and present a midterm oral briefing to the client
(2) Create a draft report and presentation to be presented to the faculty advisor
(3) Produce a professional quality, written final report
(4) Present an oral briefing of the final report to the client

Preparatory Work with Client

The faculty workshop advisor is responsible for structuring the project with the client prior to student involvement. The workshop advisor has primary responsibility for ensuring that the client understands the unique nature of a workshop project with students. As such, the workshop advisor negotiates the nature and specifics of the assignment with the client to ensure that the project has been clearly defined. The workshop advisor is responsible for providing the Office of Academic Affairs with a draft Terms of Reference (TOR) – ***Appendix 6*** – by September 16th and a completed TOR, containing a full description of the assignment and other relevant material no later than September 30th. The TOR will have the information regarding grading and the academic integrity statement added and this is what will be posted for students to view on October 15th. If you need any assistance, please contact Suzanne Hollmann, Capstone Program Director at sph2103@columbia.edu and 212-854-6279 or Saleha Awal, Capstone Program Coordinator at sa3359@columbia.edu and 212-854-9618.

As part of the process of developing the TOR, the workshop advisor should clarify the client's desired level of interaction with students and with him/her. Different clients have different preferences. Clients should not expect to work through the faculty advisor; instead, they should plan to work directly with students. Most clients will prefer that a workshop team appoints one member to liaise directly with the client. Other times, a client may become more comfortable dealing with all members of the workshop team. It is also important to determine the expected frequency of interaction between the client and the student team or the student representative. The workshop advisor should also clarify the client's preferred frequency and method of interaction (email, phone and/or face-to-face meetings) throughout the duration of the project. Given the short duration of the project the client and the student team liaison are strongly encouraged to meet or hold regular conference calls at least twice a month throughout the duration of the project. The workshop advisor is expected to remain available and accessible to the client throughout the course of the workshop.

Application and Selection of Student Teams

As noted above, faculty workshop advisors provide the Office of Academic Affairs with a TOR by September 30th. The Office of Academic Affairs provides workshop TOR and application information beginning October 15th to MIA and MPA students. Eligible students apply online for membership in spring workshop teams by ranking their order their preference for five workshops and submitting a resume and statement of interest for each workshop along with a list of their relevant coursework.

Membership on individual workshop teams is determined by the Office of Academic Affairs, in consultation with the relevant faculty advisors. First preference is given to students who will be in their final semester (2nd-year students) and must complete a workshop as part of their degree requirements, which is all MPA and MIA graduating students who have not yet taken a workshop. Other factors to be considered in the composition of the team include the mix of skills and the number of students needed to undertake the project. The range of students on a team is between four to eight students; team. If fewer than four eligible students are available to be assigned to a specific workshop, the Office of Academic Affairs will cancel the project (except in rare circumstances).

Initial Meeting with Workshop Team

Faculty advisors are encouraged to hold at least one initial planning meeting with their student team in December. The initial meeting can be used to introduce team members to one another and conduct initial team building exercises, start planning the team's work schedule for spring semester, and to identify background reading and/or initial research to be conducted during the period between fall and spring semesters. Students should not be expected to begin extensive work during the remainder of the fall semester, but can be expected to complete some preparatory work between fall and spring semesters. See ***Appendix 1*** and ***2*** regarding team-building activities and assignments that are helpful as a first meeting activity. Further readings on team dynamics include "An Introduction to Belbin's Team Roles" and Druskat and Wolff, "Building the Emotional Intelligence of Groups" (available for download here:
http://sipacapstone.wikischolars.columbia.edu/Forms+%26+Handbooks).

At the initial meeting between the workshop advisor and the workshop team, the workshop advisor should explain the grading criteria and general expectations for the workshop. These issues also are to be specified in the workshop TOR. The faculty advisor also should inform students about special considerations, such as the process for selection of various roles on the team.

The Workshop Class

Students earn three points for the successful completion of the workshop project. Each workshop is assigned a regular class meeting time (once per week for 1 hour, 50 minutes). As noted above, classes during spring 2016 begin on January 19th and end on May 2nd. Faculty advisors are expected to meet with their workshop team on a weekly basis, unless they have assigned a special team meeting or other activities to be conducted during the class time. There are fourteen sessions in the spring semester; at minimum 11 of these sessions must be held during the regularly scheduled class time.

Expectations of Workshop Advisor in Relation to Student Teams

The Workshop Advisor should:

- Set up and attend initial meeting between client and students
- Meet with students during the weekly class time (to be stated in workshop TOR)
- Teach students about improving both their work methodology and substantive knowledge relative to the project
- Provide feedback on both oral and written exchanges of information
- Intervene on behalf of students with client as necessary
- Intervene on behalf of client with students as necessary
- Award grades to students – the client can provide input, but the faculty advisor is responsible for grades

Assigning Roles

- ***Required:*** SIPA Liaison—throughout the course of the semester the Office of Academic Affairs will need to communicate with groups regarding various internal deadlines, notifications and events. In order to reduce the pressure on advisors, we ask that you assign a student to be the SIPA liaison.
- *Suggested:* Project Manager/Client Liaison—Typically, the project manager is the designated spokesperson for the team to the client
- *Suggested:* Fieldwork Coordinator/ Data coordinator
- *Suggested:* Editor (see appendix #2 for more information and examples of team roles)

Final Report to the Office of Academic Affairs

The faculty workshop advisor should ensure that the SIPA Liaison has provided the Office of Academic Affairs an electronic copy **(in Word .doc format)** of the final report and project abstract by May 13th. The faculty advisor should consult with the client about whether the final report is confidential or can be made available via the SIPA website and other means to interested parties – this information should be clearly stipulated on the report. The client should not be pressured to release the results.

If the client would prefer the report to remain confidential, we ask that each team submits the full report along with the executive summary or abridged report that we may disseminate in place of the full report.

SIPA Capstone Midterm Presentations

The SIPA Capstone Midterm Presentations – on March 3rd & 4th at the Kellogg Center (15th floor in the International Affairs Building) from 9am-5pm. The SIPA Capstone Presentations are intended to provide an opportunity for teams to present their initial findings and discuss analytical issues or problems they are having. Teams will briefly summarize their work to date and present expected outcomes. Teams will be grouped based on the nature of their workshop and will be given 15 minutes to present to a panel of Capstone advisors followed by 15 minutes of Q&A.

All students are expected to attend the presentation. Panelists will be composed of Capstone faculty advisors and will respond with methodological and analytical suggestions. The SIPA Capstone Midterm Presentations are open to SIPA students and first year students are encouraged to attend. Faculty advisors are asked to serve as panelists. The Midterm Presentations can take the place of the weekly class for that week.

SIPA Capstone Final Reception

We will celebrate the achievements of each of the Capstone teams at our end-of-year reception in early May (4pm-5:30pm) on the 15th floor Kellogg Center (1501) and lobby. All Capstone student participants, clients and advisors are encouraged to attend. SIPA Dean Merit Janow will open the reception with a few words of welcome.

We will select five Capstone teams to give a brief presentation on their project (no more than 5 minutes each). Interested teams should send a brief prospectus of your project, no longer than one page and four supporting PowerPoint slides. The prospectus and slides should include a brief description of the problem, the methodology used and the solution or impact the project is expected to have. Selection of the teams will be based on the quality of the proposal and the diversity of the projects represented for the 2016 spring workshops.

Evaluating Student Performance

Grades for the workshop will be determined by the advisors based on criteria stated in the workshop TOR.

Grading (students receive an individual grade):

Grades for the workshop will be based on the following criteria:

- Quality of individual written work (10%)
- Quality of participation in class (20%)
- Feedback from the client (20%)
- Overall professionalism, including timeliness, ability to work with team, etc. (20%)
- Quality of team's final report and briefing (30%)

Appendix 1: Project Teambuilding Form

Project Teambuilding

One of the key factors in the success of a workshop project is the effectiveness of the project team in maximizing its diverse mix of skills and experience, and in managing interpersonal dynamics and project-related tasks. Research indicates that virtually all teams "evolve" through several stages of development, and that this process is facilitated when (1) team members first assess their own strengths and weaknesses related to their participation in the team, and (2) the team sets clear objectives and ground rules to guide its activities.

These initial team-building activities are intended to help you and your workshop team get off on the right track and maximize your enjoyment of the workshop experience. Individual team members will complete **Part I (Self-Assessment)** on their own and will email their self-assessment to their faculty advisor by the beginning of the spring semester. Each team will work on **Part II (Team Guidelines)** and will post their team guidelines in the CourseWorks drop-boxes prior to the start of the spring semester.

I. **Self-Assessment** (to be completed by each team member)

Analyze your particular **strengths** and **weaknesses** related to working on your workshop project, your **expectations** for the workshop (i.e. what you want to get out of it by the end of the semester, and any **constraints** on your full participation in team meetings, field travel or other aspects of the workshop project (e.g., other course requirements, work-study or internship requirements, family responsibilities, etc.). Summarize this self-assessment in a "SWEC" matrix as shown below. (Bullet points are fine. Your "SWEC" matrix should easily fit on one page.)

Name: ___________________________

Team Client's Name: ___________________________

Self-Assessment

Strengths (related to the team project):	**Expectations** (about the team project and workshop experience):
Weaknesses (related to the team project):	**Constraints** (on full participation in the team project):

II. Team Guidelines (to be developed by each team)

Each team will develop basic guidelines for its activities over the next three and a half months. The guidelines should cover at least the following basic topics, but teams should feel free to include other topics or team management mechanisms that they think would be useful. Team members will be expected to follow these guidelines. Teams are also encouraged to revise their guidelines periodically, as needed (e.g., to address any unanticipated issues or to further improve their performance). The guidelines shouldn't be longer than 2 pages.

Team Client's Name: ____

Team Members: ____

1. **Team Objectives**

2. **Shared Principles**

3. **Potential Obstacles or Challenges to Achieving the Team Objective(s)**

4. **Key Team Functions** (faculty contact; client contact; project manager; SIPA liaison; etc.)

5. **Core Meeting Times** (in addition to class time, at least 2 additional hours when everyone is available per week)

6. **Ground Rules** (should cover topics such as communications; setting and management of meetings including agenda/conduct/minutes; possible rotation of roles/responsibilities; decision-making; allocation of work; and consequences for team members who don't follow the rules)

7. **Resolution of Problems** (the team's strategy for minimizing and resolving disagreements or other problems that may arise – e.g., regular communication; regular "check-in" on team dynamics at the start of meetings; brainstorming or use of a mediator to resolve disagreements between team members)

Appendix 2: Examples of Team Roles

Examples of Capstone Roles
Provided by Adam Quinton

1. Project Manager
Oversee project timeline and key deliverables
Prepare and then maintain the Project Control Plan
Prepare meeting secretary roster

2. SIPA Administrative Liaison
Primary contact between the team and Office of Academic Affairs (OAA)
Ensure SIPA required deliverables are known and adhered to
Organize mid-term update presentation to SIPA
Managing the team budget, coordinating travel plans, room reservations, conference calls, AV requests etc
Delivering final electronic copy of report to the OAA (both the complete report and that which is approved for publication on the website)

3. Client Liaison
Primary contact with Client
Ensure Client is informed of project progress and status of deliverables on a timely basis
Ensure Client keeps the team informed of relevant internal developments
Coordinate info briefings for the team by Client staff
Organize final report presentation at Client's office (if possible)

4. Fieldwork coordinator
Develop standard interview questionnaire
Assign calling schedule to individual team members and monitor progress
Maintain log of contacts with outside organizations.

5. **Written report editor**
Propose format of written report
Oversee writing of draft project report - commission and collate sections from each team member
Submit draft report to Advisor and Client for review
Post review incorporate recommendations and deliver finished version.

6. Presentation materials editor
Work with written report editor and individual team members to prepare PPT version of the report for delivery to Client

Rotating Role (one person/week):
7. Meeting secretary
Confirm date/time/venue for next team meeting
Send out meeting planner on a timely basis to include agenda for the meeting
Prepare minutes of each meeting i.e. a summary of key decisions and action points

Appendix 3: Peer Assessment Form

Peer Assessment

This team assessment is intended to give you an opportunity to reflect on the experience of your workshop team thus far. Your individual responses are confidential and will not be shared with other members of your team. Your responses will help identify any teamwork issues that your team and your faculty advisor may want to address to ensure that the remainder of the workshop is productive and enjoyable as possible. Your responses will also help your faculty advisor assess the contributions of individual team members.

Please email your completed assessment **by __________ at 5:00 pm.** (Please include your name in the file name for your assessment.)

Name: ___________________________________

I. Self/Peer Assessments

Please fill in the names of your team members in the headings of the table below. Then using the following scale, please assess each member of your team (including yourself) on the listed characteristics by marking the appropriate number in each box in the table:

2 A clear strength
1 Fairly strong
0 Neither strong nor weak
-1 Fairly weak
-2 A clear weakness
N/A Not applicable

Individual Characteristic	**You**	**Name:**	**Name:**	**Name:**	**Name:**	**Name:**	**Name:**
Attending team meetings							
Meeting commitments and deadlines							
Contributing to team assignments							
Quality of work							
Communicating and coordinating with other team members							
Balancing other commitments with team participation							

II. Team Assessment

Using the following scale, please assess the overall strengths/weaknesses of your team by placing an X in the appropriate box for each of the listed characteristics:

2 A clear strength of our team
1 Fairly strong
0 Neither a strength nor a weakness
-1 Fairly weak (but manageable)
-2 A clear weakness of our team
N/A Not applicable

Team Characteristic	**-2**	**-1**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**N/A**
Scheduling and attending meetings						
Holding effective and efficient team meetings						
Evenly distributing the work						
Everyone doing his/her part						
Following through on commitments and deadlines						
Everyone producing high-quality work						
Work styles blending effectively						
Able to reach consensus in a timely manner						
Managing strong personalities						
Balancing other commitments with team participation						

III. Other Comments (optional)

In the space below, please feel free to comment on any particular challenges that your team has faced thus far and how you have tried to address them (or plan to address them in the remainder of the spring semester):

Appendix 4: Client Evaluation Form

SIPA Spring 2016 Client Evaluation Form

(Note: form submitted through online form)

Please respond to the questions below. Feel free to include comments as applicable but no portion of the survey should be left completely blank.

5	Excellent
4	Very Good
3	Good
2	Fair
1	Poor

Project Organization & Deliverables

1. Covered the agreed upon project goals as determined at the outset of the project:

2. Organization of the workshop (e.g. team interaction with client, research gathering, production of deliverables):

3. Relevance and quality of the written deliverables:

4. Relevance and quality of presentation:

5. Overall evaluation of the project:

Faculty Advisor

6. Advisor’s presentation of expectations and workshop process to client:

7. Advisor’s responsiveness to client when needed:

8. Advisor’s knowledge of the subject matter:

9. Overall evaluation of the faculty advisor:

Project Participants

11. Extent to which the individual team members contributed to this project. In other words, based on your observation, how would you rate the way the work was divided and completed?

12. Overall evaluation of the team's performance and professionalism over the course of the workshop:

Comments

1. Please provide brief, specific and constructive comments on overall project organization and report.

2. Please provide brief, specific and constructive comments on the advisor's performance.

3. Please provide brief, specific and constructive comments on the team members' performance.

4. We encourage the public dissemination of final workshop reports but respect our clients' confidentiality. Do you have any concern about our posting the SIPA team's final report on our website? If so, please specify.

Appendix 5: Student Capstone Workshop Evaluation

Spring 2016 SIPA Capstone Workshop Evaluations

(Note: This evaluation is administered to students by the Office of Academic Affairs via CourseWorks. Responses are anonymous.)

Workshop Setup and Implementation

N/A Not Applicable
5 Excellent
4 Very Good
3 Good
2 Fair
1 Poor

1. How well did the workshop choices align with your interests?

2. Please evaluate the relevance and quality of the class sessions.

3. Were the SIPA mid-term presentations helpful in the development of your final project?

4. Overall evaluation of workshop.

Faculty Advisor Performance

N/A Not Applicable
5 Excellent
4 Very Good
3 Good
2 Fair
1 Poor

1. Was the faculty advisor well organized and prepared?

2. How was the faculty advisor's attitude towards the students? (1=very negative, 5=very positive)

3. How accessible was the faculty advisor?

4. How clearly did the faculty advisor present his/her expectations of the workshop?

5. Did the faculty advisor possess the substantive knowledge necessary for the project?

6. How would you evaluate the faculty advisor's ability to guide and facilitate student work for the project?

7. Overall evaluation of the faculty advisor.

Group Performance

N/A Not Applicable
5 Excellent
4 Very Good
3 Good
2 Fair
1 Poor

1. What was the quality and level of teamwork?

2. What was the quality and level of participation of group members?

3. How well was the work divided/assigned?

4. Overall evaluation of the group.

Client Interaction

N/A Not Applicable
5 Excellent
4 Very Good
3 Good
2 Fair
1 Poor

1. How would you rate the client's overall attitude towards the project?

2. Was your client available and accessible to the extent you needed?

3. Would you recommend working with this client again? (yes/no)

Additional Comments

1. Please provide brief, specific and constructive comments.

2. Please list your suggestions for future clients and project topics.

Appendix 6: Terms of Reference (TOR) Template

Capstone Workshop Program

School of International and Public Affairs / Columbia University

Terms of Reference

Between

[Client Organization name] [Project Director – insert name]
and
[SIPA Capstone Workshop Faculty Advisor - insert name]

Project Title:

Client Organization:

Client Project Director Contact Information:

Background: *[Please provide brief background on the specific unit within the client organization that is proposing the project – e.g., goals, objectives and means.]*

Objective: *[Please briefly present a clear, concise statement of the problem/issue to be addressed.]*

Tasks: *[To the extent known, please briefly outline the major steps of the project (e.g., research, field study, analysis) that will be required.]*

Deliverables and timetable: *[The basic deliverables usually include a detailed work plan; draft report outline; draft report; final report; and presentation of key findings and recommendations both at the Client's office and at SIPA in April/May 2016. Please list these and any other deliverables with estimated due dates.]*

Requirements: *[Please list the preferred qualifications of the student team working on this assignment, including language proficiency, country or regional experience, technical expertise, research skills or other specialized experience and knowledge]*

Logistics: *[List the specific support and resources required, and responsibilities of each of the parties or agencies involved in the MOU. For example, what is the expected availability of the client (how frequently, via phone or in person)? Will students be required to travel outside of New York City for this project? If so, please contact Suzanne Hollmann, Capstone Program Director at sph2103@columbia.edu – in nearly all situations, SIPA will ask the client organization to cover travel expenses.]*

Appendix 7: Resource Materials for Student Workshop Participants

Resource Materials for Student Workshop Participants

I. SUGGESTIONS FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT

A. Defining the Problem

The first step in analysis is to define the problem you are analyzing. You will begin this process with several resources: (1) the faculty advisor's summary of the understanding between the client and Columbia; (2) a key contact, client or project officer at the client organization; and (3) your faculty advisor.

The process of problem definition begins by ensuring that there is a fit between the problem to be solved and the resources available to solve the problem. A workshop project is necessarily limited by student time and capability and the number of weeks in the semester. These constraints will affect the amount of data collection and analysis possible. The feasibility of data collection and analysis should be the chief non-analytic factors considered in problem definition.

Once an initial problem definition is agreed to by the research team, the faculty advisor, and the agency client, it should be further refined and operationally defined in the project control plan.

B. Client Relationships

There is no single model for research team-faculty-client relationships. The key variable will be the nature of the project and the role played by the client. In some instances, the client will provide a good deal of guidance and direction to the research team. In other cases, the client may play a less visible role or prefer to work through the student liaison. In any event, the customer or the client is always right. This does not mean that issues could not be discussed with the client; it means that the client has the last word. However, the client is not simply an authority figure. He or she is: (1) a guide to sources of data; (2) responsible for obtaining agency clearance to conduct interviews or obtain files; (3) the person best suited to evaluate the team's analytic framework and research questions; and (4) usually a subject matter expert in the field of inquiry. Therefore, it is essential that a good productive relationship be established with the client. The client's feedback should be sought on all key project questions and issues.

C. SIPA Capstone Midterm Presentations: March 3rd & 4th | Kellogg Center (15th floor IAB) from 9am-5pm

The SIPA Capstone Mid-Term Presentations are intended to provide an opportunity for teams to present their initial findings and discuss analytical issues or problems they are having. Teams will briefly summarize their work to date and present expected outcomes. Teams will be grouped based on the nature of their workshop and will be given 15 minutes to present to a panel of Capstone advisors followed by 15 minutes of Q&A. All students are expected to attend the presentation. Panelists will be composed of capstone faculty advisors and will respond with methodological and analytical suggestions.

The midterm briefing should be about 15 minutes in length. Some suggestions for the content are:

- A brief description of the project and the client.
- A description of your project methodology and why you chose it. What other methods did you consider? Why did you reject these other strategies?
- A description of the data/information you are collecting and your collection methodology. Was there any information that you wanted to collect, but could not?
- How did this shape the way you chose to conduct your analysis?

A description of the major problems left to be resolved. These may be analytical problems or problems of some other nature such as problems in your relationship with your client.

- A short summary of the tasks you have left to finish.

Following the group's briefing, the panel will have a brief period to ask questions. If you have any analytical problems that you think other students or faculty may be able to offer advice on, feel free to raise those in your briefing. These midterm sessions should be a time for you to reassess your project and to get a fresh perspective from some interested parties who have not been directly involved in your work.

D. The Project Control Plan – To be completed by the student teams

The most critical early phase of a research project is the development of a plan to manage the project. For purposes of convention we have labeled that plan the Project Control Plan (PCP). Below is a sample outline for a PCP. All PCPs should include most of these elements, but this sample should only be seen as a model. Each element of the PCP should have an expected date of completion determined early on in the project. These dates will be modified as needed throughout the project.

Every PCP should include the following outputs and milestones:

(1) A draft report
(2) A midterm briefing to the client on the project's progress
(3) An oral briefing of the initial findings and expected outcomes to the workshop members and other students and faculty
(4) A final report
(5) An oral briefing of the final report to the client.

The PCP is the first "deliverable" of the workshop project. It should be given to the faculty advisor early in the semester. At the first workshop session your advisor will arrange a due date.

II. CREATING THE PROJECT CONTROL PLAN

A. Operational Definition of the Problem

The first section of the PCP is a detailed definition of the problem. This section should not be more than one page. It should be developed in consultation with the client and should answer the question: What problem is the workshop team trying to develop solutions for?

B. Project Overview

The overview is a 3-5 page study prospectus. It should be a mixture of prose and outline. To write the overview the research team will need to catalogue and briefly review available data and literature. It will discuss the gaps in available data analyses that the project will seek to bridge. The overview should include a first draft of the final report outline, and the study design and methodology. It should also discuss the expected results and benefits of the study. It is always useful to compare these early expectations to the report finally submitted to the client.

C. Brief Task Descriptions

A detailed outline that describes the tasks, subtasks, and critical milestones that must be reached to produce the outputs required by the client and the workshop.

D. Assignment of Responsibilities

In this section you should answer the critical management question -- who does it? Who is responsible for completing the tasks you have just described? Who plays a supporting role?

E. Schedule of Tasks

All of this may seem terrific and complete, until you figure out that you have 6 person-months of work and only 3 person-months of labor. This section should address the following questions:

- When do tasks start and end?
- Are the tasks properly sequenced? If "A" must be completed to start "B", will "A" be ready on time?
- How many person-days are required for each task?

EXHIBIT 1: SAMPLE OUTLINE FOR A WORKSHOP PROJECT CONTROL PLAN

I. Operational Definition of the Analytic Research Problem

- **A.** What problem is the team trying to solve?
- **B.** What research will be necessary to provide a solution?

II. Project Overview:

Although the project will often determine the specific nature of the report, generally the overview could include:

- **A.** Description of Available Data and Literature
- **B.** Discussion of Data Needs
- **C.** "First Cut" of Study Design and Methodology
    - **1.** How data will be collected
    - **2.** Probable study hypotheses
    - **3.** Draft analytic strategy
- **D.** Draft Outline of Final Report
- **E.** Expected Result and Benefits

III. Brief Task Descriptions

- **A.** Develop Final Study Design and Methodology
    - **1.** Develop survey instruments and/or other data-collection strategies
    - **2.** Pose study hypotheses
- **B.** Collect Data
    - **1.** Interview (who, what, where, when, why, how)
    - **2.** File searches
    - **3.** Literature review
    - **4.** Other
- **C.** Analyze Data
    - **1.** Relate date to study hypotheses
    - **2.** Develop and implement final analytic strategy
- **D.** Provide Recommendations to Solve the Problem
- **E.** Develop Preliminary Report
    - **1.** Summarize preliminary findings
    - **2.** Brief client
- **F.** Develop Draft Report
    - **1.** Outline draft report
    - **2.** Assigning writing tasks
    - **3.** Edit draft report

G. Develop Workshop Briefing

1. Assign responsibilities
2. Develop A/V materials (PowerPoint, etc.) and briefing book
3. Conduct dry run

H. Write Final Report

1. Write outline and review with client
2. Assign writing tasks
3. Edit final report

IV. Assignment of Possible Roles/Responsibilities

A. Project Manager/Client Liaison

1. Name
2. Specific lead responsibilities

B. Editor

1. Name
2. Specific lead responsibilities

C. Fieldwork Coordinator

1. Name
2. Specific lead responsibilities

D. SIPA Liaison (REQUIRED)

1. Name
2. Specific lead responsibilities

E. Other

1. Name
2. Specific lead responsibilities

V. Schedule of Tasks

A. Graphic display of tasks, responsibilities, milestones, and outputs

B. Week-by-week table of information summarized in the graphic display described above

III. GROUP RESEARCH

A. Common Problems

The most common problem with group work is gaining the wholehearted participation of all group members. In the workshop project we hope to avoid this problem by clearly assigning responsibilities in the PCP, and by constant interaction between faculty and students.

It is important to note that, while this is a collaborative project, each student will receive an individual letter grade. Therefore, if a student does not contribute equally to the project, he or she will not receive the same grade for the project as the other students.

Another common problem is scheduling. In order for the team to communicate effectively, it is necessary that the team set a time to meet as a group, independent of the weekly scheduled class meeting with the faculty advisor, to work through the research and development of the project. An effective tool to assist with scheduling this meeting is doodle.com. In the first class meeting, the team should find a mutually convenient time to meet as a team and agree to this time in their Project Teambuilding form (Appendix 1).

Other common problems are personality conflicts, varied skill levels within the group, and "grandstanding." It is not necessary for everyone on the team to be an expert in all areas of the project.

It is expected that the team will work together and bring their collective strengths to the project. Students should look at the project as an opportunity to hone the skills they already possess and to work with their colleagues to share in the responsibilities of the project. When problems develop, group members must deal with the problem forthrightly and try to resolve the conflict first on their own as they would in any other professional setting. If this is not possible, bring the problem to the attention of the faculty advisor before it gets out of hand. If team dynamics are affecting productivity, it is possible to use the **peer evaluation form (see Appendix 3** to address internal issues to resolve the problem.

IV. FIELDWORK AND DATA COLLECTION

A. How to Organize It

The client should play an active role in determining appropriate sources of data, including the individuals who should be interviewed. Since the workshop projects must be completed in three months, and since staff resources are extremely limited, fieldwork and data collection must be carefully targeted. As a rule of thumb no more than half the person-days in the project should be devoted to fieldwork and data collection. Time must be available for analyzing data, developing recommendations, and preparing reports and briefings.

Data collection should be a planned rather than haphazard activity. A strategy should be developed to enable the research team to focus its efforts on the collection of data directly relevant to the problem described in the PCP.

As a rule, a review of existing data should precede the collection of new data, and should be used to target personal interviews and other data collection activities. Bear in mind that collecting new data is quite time consuming for both the research team and individuals who are interviewed. Whenever possible, existing data should be used and new data only collected when truly needed.

B. How to Conduct Research

Data collection can be a frustrating, time-consuming activity. Having a data collection strategy helps, and using key contacts to help focus your activity can also be useful. Once you are at the data collection site (respondent's workplace or home, office files, data archive, newspaper morgues, library, etc.) you should always maintain two objectives: (1) gather the information you need as efficiently as possible, and (2) remain unobtrusive. Personal interviews and file searches are particularly sensitive situations. In both cases the researcher is intruding on the workspace and time of the individuals and organizations being studied.

1. Interviews

Remember that when you conduct an interview you are a representative of your client and the University. You should be cordial, respectful, and professional. At the beginning of the interview you should always identify yourself, the University, and your client -- and briefly explain the objectives of the study and the role the respondent plays in it.

Immediately upon leaving the interview, check your notes and add additional information you can remember, but didn't have time to write down during the interview. If your respondent wishes to see a copy of the study when it is completed, take down his or her mailing address or business card and promise a follow-up. Clients may have different policies regarding the release of reports but at a minimum the faculty advisor (or Client) can send a follow-up letter explaining that policy and including the abstract of the project report.

2. Access to Files

If you have obtained permission to search an office's files or other written records you must be certain not to interfere with the normal use of those files. Before leaving the office you should ask the individual responsible for giving you access to the files if he or she would like to review your notes or photo-copies.

V. REPORT WRITING AND BRIEFING

After you have collected and analyzed your data, it is necessary to communicate your findings. In the workshop this is accomplished through written reports and formal briefings. Other forms of communication typical in public sector agencies include memos, informal briefings, meetings, and audio-visual tools.

A. Planning a Report

Reports for workshop clients are not term papers. Term papers tend to be long. Useful policy-relevant reports tend to be short and to the point. When reviewing a draft report you should always ask: Is this (chapter section, paragraph, sentence, word) needed to communicate the point? One way of ensuring a succinct report is to think through the report before you begin writing. Before writing, always develop a logical, detailed outline.

The outline should be organized to answer the questions posed in the problem statement included in the PCP. The outline should be divisible into distinct units to facilitate the assignment of writing responsibilities. Every member of the group should be given responsibility for writing the first draft of one section of the report. Some advisors choose to select an editor for the group, while others prefer to divide up the task of editing equally among members.

B. Writing the Report

After preparing the report outline the project team should submit it to the faculty advisor. Once approved by the advisor the outline should then be submitted to the client. Report writing should not begin until the client, the advisor, and the group has agreed to a final outline. The PCP should include time to review and revise the outline.

Similarly, the PCP should allow enough time for multiple drafts of the report to be written, reviewed, and revised. First drafts of each section of the paper should be submitted to the faculty advisor for comment. Comments should then be incorporated into a second draft of the report which should then be submitted to the group's editor to consolidate and edit.

The editor's first draft is then presented to the client for comment. After discussing the client's comments with the faculty advisor, the editor (and possibly other members of the research team) prepares a draft final report for submission to the faculty advisor and client. If the draft final report is acceptable to the advisor and client, it becomes the final report. If further revision is needed, the report must be rewritten.

Multiple drafts may seem repetitive, however they are a necessary part of analysis in any work environment. Analysis will often raise sensitive issues that the client will be more conscious of than the research team. The client may have additional data or new considerations that need to be reflected in the report and the research team must comply with the client's needs.

C. Briefings

1. Planning and Conducting a Briefing

Each research team is responsible for presenting three formal briefings during the course of the semester. The first is a mid-term progress report presented to the client. The second is presented during the **Midterm SIPA presentations** and is based on the PCP; teams are expected to present their initial findings and discuss analytical issues or problems they are having. Teams will briefly summarize their work to date and present expected outcomes. The third is the final client briefing. Briefings can run from five minutes to several hours. The faculty advisor will assign you a time limit for your workshop and client briefings.

Briefings should always be short and to the point. When reporting on a research project, they should include a statement of the problem, a brief discussion of the study's methodology, findings, and recommendations. Bear in mind that you are more familiar with the subject of your briefings than your audience. When preparing a briefing try to gauge the amount of knowledge your audience has. When in doubt, it is better to assume a lack of knowledge than to assume the presence of knowledge. Repetition is boring, but the absence of basic information is a significant obstacle to communication. It is better to be boring than incomprehensible -- although, naturally, it's best to be neither. Briefings should be lively and stimulating. Try to get your audience engaged in your topic. Explain your problem in terms that people can relate to and identify with.

A briefing should never be scripted. The group should prepare talking points to guide the presentation. Visual aids are an essential element of a good briefing. However, visual aids should serve and not dominate the communication process. Visual aids should illustrate key points. We recommend that the team provide a briefing book to each member of the audience.

It is essential that briefings be rehearsed. A "dry-run" will tell you if you are within your time limit, and will allow you to work out bugs before you appear in public. Although more than one person may speak at a briefing, there must always be a briefing leader. A moderator who acts like a TV news anchor person can help give the briefing coherence, and the appearance of organization. Finally, a formal briefing should allocate a few minutes to answer questions from the audience, facilitating interest and communication through dialogue.