



MPA CAPSTONE REQUIREMENTS: The Case of the MPA Programs at the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University

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I will briefly:

1. Discuss the role of the workshop and portfolio course in the MPA curriculum at Columbia.
2. Describe the different types of capstones we use at SIPA
3. Compare and contrast those courses



1. The role of capstone courses at Columbia's MPA programs

- ✦ Integrate discrete elements of the core curriculum in an effort to address "real world" public policy and management problems
- ✦ Develop group process, project management and communication skills
- ✦ For executive students: An opportunity to apply the curriculum directly to professional practice
- ✦ Provide a public service to local governmental and nonprofit agencies



2. The different capstones at SIPA

✦ Traditional MPA:

- From 1982-2002: Fall semester management simulation, spring semester analytic project for a government or non profit client
- The simulation developed an implementation plan for a piece of proposed but not yet enacted legislation (or treaty) and included:
 - A legislative summary, stakeholder analysis, analysis of areas of administrative discretion, program design, organization and contracting plan, budget and financial management system, performance measurement system and master calendar
- Currently includes a client project in the fall



2. The different capstones at SIPA (Continued)

✚ MPA In Environmental Science and Policy

- Management simulation based on old MPA model in the summer and fall: All environmental issues
- In the summer students explore the science of the environmental problem and the science of legislation's proposed solution
- In the fall they continue and develop the "traditional" implementation plan
- In the spring they undertake projects for clients

2. The different capstones at SIPA (Continued)

✦ The Executive MPA Portfolio Course:

- A case study of a management issue at the student's place of work or another piece of analytic work such as a strategic plan.
- A collection and annotation of written work from the student's place of work.
 - A collection of at least 5 pieces of written work the student has produced on the job, since the beginning of their course of study at Columbia. Each piece of written work is accompanied by a brief discussion of the specific curriculum elements that helped produce that work.
- Presentation of written work.
 - The Portfolio Faculty Advisors convene three sessions with all of the students they are advising.



3. The SIPA Capstones Compared

- ✦ All three capstone experiences share the goal of applying enhanced analytic tools to public sector problem solving
 - They emphasize the need to tailor these tools the particular needs of the organization and situation at hand
 - They all require the use of project planning and work planning
 - In the case of the workshop classes, there is an emphasis on group work, and learning to deal with tight deadlines



3. The SIPA Capstones Compared (Continued)

- ✦ In the environmental MPA program the workshop is both a capstone and an applied management and analytic sequence
 - It is required in each of the program's three semesters
- ✦ In the "traditional" MPA it is meant to complement the internship and provide a capstone, integrating experience
- ✦ In the Executive Program it is an effort to teach students how to apply what they are learning to their professional practice

3. The SIPA Capstones Compared (Continued)

- ✦ The capstones are meant as an integrating conclusion to the program and an exercise in immersion education: an opportunity for learning by doing
- ✦ The faculty role is different than in a lecture or a seminar course
 - Advisor, mentor, coach, project manager, editor, etc.
- ✦ Very labor intensive and when done well more time consuming than traditional teaching
- ✦ A critical element of an applied, professional degree program