

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

School of Professional Studies

DEPARTMENT OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM

PROJECT GUIDE

PAD 644

2016

Description of the Capstone Project

Students of public administration undertake the supervised Capstone Project once they have completed nearly all core courses in the program. The Project is coordinated by a faculty advisor. The student will enroll either on ground or online in PAD 644. The Capstone Project is intended to demonstrate the student's ability to carry out independent scholarly research, to draw logical conclusions from data gathered, and to present the results in a clear, intelligible, and consistent form, in keeping with the established convention of the scholarly community. Students near the end of their program will have the opportunity to synthesize the course work while applying their knowledge to a practical problem culminating in the Capstone Project. The student may choose an area of research which has interested him/her in the process of taking another course.

Therefore it is the responsibility of the student to meet all of the requirements and NOT the responsibility of the faculty advisor, who must ascertain that the standards have been met. Students meet as a class once a week for two months either on ground or online. Upon completion of the Project, students present the Project to the committee, other faculty, and peers in an open forum.

Goals of the Capstone Project

The purpose of this course is to provide students with the opportunity to acquire and demonstrate the skills involved in developing and designing a viable research Project; collecting and analyzing data; evaluating research data and drawing conclusions; making an oral presentation of research findings; and applying the APA format.

Capstone Projects must address practical issues in public administration and must do so in a rigorous fashion. Although variation is permitted, these Projects commonly take one of these four forms:

- Analysis of a policy question with recommendations
- Analysis of a public law issue with administrative guidance and recommendations
- Description and analysis of a public management strategy, approach, or trend, with recommendations
- Case study of an organizational issue with lessons learned and recommendations

The Capstone Project challenges student and tests their abilities. It has proven its value over and over again. For instance, many students have found Capstone Projects to be useful as writing samples in job searches. Some have developed substantive and technical expertise in completing the capstone research that proved instrumental in securing a job following graduation. In sum, it is documentation of a personal mastery of professional competencies. It is designed to be an integrative experience for MPA students.

Objectives of the Capstone Project

Upon completion of the Project, students will be able to:

1. develop a research question;
2. formulate a testable research hypothesis;
3. conduct a literature review;
4. draw conclusions and make recommendations based on the available data;
5. show an understanding of the ethical issues surrounding the collection and reporting of research data;

Requirements of the Capstone Project

Each student must complete a research Project that conforms to the requirements described in the handout PAD 644 Capstone Project - Requirements. Each Project must be organized into a five-chapter APA format on a topic related to the field of public administration. Research Projects will utilize a methodology appropriate for the research topic.

Section 1: Organization of Contents

Elements

The following preliminary pages (numbered in lowercase Roman numerals) precede the body of the Project, in this order:

- title page
- dedication page (optional)
- acknowledgments (optional)
- abstract
- table of contents
- list of tables (if appropriate)
- list of illustrations (charts, graphs, figures) (if appropriate)
- list of symbols (if appropriate)
- preface (optional)

Paginated in Arabic numerals are the text and other pages following the preliminary pages arranged in the following order:

- text (chapters of the manuscript)
- endnotes
- appendices
- references
- index (optional)

Title Page

All Capstone Projects must carry the following information on the title page:

A research Project presented to the faculty of National University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Public Administration.
Refer to sample page in back.

Dedication

Use discretion in making a dedication. The dedication should be consistent with the topic of the research.

Acknowledgments

Use discretion in making acknowledgments. It is customary to acknowledge special assistance from extramural agencies. There is no obligation that assistance received from the faculty advisor be acknowledged. Acknowledgments should be couched in terms consistent with the scholarly nature of the work. They must be on a separate page, cannot exceed one page, and should not exceed one paragraph in length, and should adopt a restrained tone. Your name and date should not appear on this page.

Abstract

All abstracts must be double-spaced and the title should simply be ABSTRACT. The abstract can be no more than 350 words. It should present clearly and concisely the main objectives of the study, the results, and their significance. References are generally not included in the abstract.

Table of Contents

The table of contents is designed for the convenience of the reader. It should consist of the acknowledgment page, abstract, list of tables, list of illustrations, list of abbreviations or symbols, appendices and references as well as the major sections in the text. Do not list the "Title Page" or "Table of Contents" in the table of contents. Please note the following:

- you must have dot leaders between the end of a heading and its page number
- headings in the table of contents should appear as they do in the text

List of Tables

The term "table" applies to numerical and statistical data set in vertical or horizontal alignment. If there are tables in your text/appendix, a list of tables must be included. The "List of Tables" is on a page by itself and arranged in the same general format as the Table of Contents. Type the table numbers in Arabic numerals, and the titles in capital and small letters, with period leaders extending from the last letter of the title to the page number. Please note:

- Titles may be shorter than they appear in the text as long as they are not misleading. Titles may not be longer than the titles in the text.
- Numbering of tables. You have two options: (a) You may begin by numbering the first table with the numeral “1” and continue to number your tables consecutively throughout the entire manuscript; or (b) you may number the first table in each chapter with the numeral “1” and continue to number your tables consecutively within each chapter. For example, if chapter four has three tables and chapter five has three tables, the numbering would be as follows: 4.1, 4.2, 4.3; 5.1, 5.2, 5.3.
- Single space within titles, which are longer than one line, but double space between each entry.
- Tables one page or less in length should never be divided. Tables must not exceed the usual margins of the page in the manuscript.

List of Illustrations (charts, graphs, figures)

This list is also placed on a page by itself and arranged in the same general format as the Table of Contents. Designate figure numbers with Arabic numerals, and plate numbers, if any, with capital Roman numerals. If the Project contains both figures and plates, arrange them on separate lists.

List of Symbols

If symbols are needed in the text, a list should be provided to explain their definitions or meanings. The list should be placed on a separate page and included where specified by these instructions.

Preface

A preface, while optional, enables you to explain your purpose and perhaps justify your choice of a topic. The preface is also an appropriate place to present a summary of the Project, including a description of what is to be found in each chapter. If utilized, it is part of the preliminary pages (numbered with Roman numerals) and therefore precedes the main text.

Text

The organization of the text varies somewhat with the subject matter. The Project is divided into five chapters, each chapter titled and beginning on a new page. In general, the content of the five chapters include:

Chapter I: Introduction

The first chapter provides an overview of the Project. The specific subsections of this chapter will vary, depending on the subject matter. In general, the first chapter should include the following information:

Background of the Study: provide a brief history of the ideas and issues related to the research topic. This section should not be a review of the literature (though some information may be repeated in the literature review), but a description of the events leading up to this research.

Problem Statement: this is the heart of the research Project. This subsection states the reason(s) why this research Project is important. A good way to approach the Problem Statement is to address the following: Because of x and y, there is a problem in society (or the public administration system); if only we knew more about z, things might be better. The research Project should be designed to answer z, which is the research question.

Students first might want to pose a question to be answered, and then rephrase that question into the form of a statement.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study: list the component parts of the research question. Rarely is a problem in public administration one dimensional. This subsection should describe the specific elements of the problem being addressed by the research. It should also have at least 4 objectives. This section is written in the form of a discussion rather than just listing the objectives. Chapter II will focus on a discussion surrounding these objectives.

Rationale of the Study: develop the reasons for examining the elements described in the purpose and objectives section. Explain why those elements were selected, how they relate to the topic of the research, and how they related to each other. In other words, explain how will accomplishing the purpose and objectives answers the research question, and is something we should care about.

Definition of Terms: list definitions for only those terms which might be unfamiliar to the reader, especially those which can be considered terms of art and operational definitions. Definitions should have references if they are of a technical nature.

Limitations of the Study: describe self imposed limits on the research, including those that relate to both the breadth and depth of the inquiry. Also include limitations that exist due to factors beyond your control. Describe the (potential) effects the specific limitations may have on your research.

Theoretical Framework: if the research is driven by, or relates to, a particular theoretical orientation, provide a brief overview of that orientation and how it relates to the research.

Research Hypotheses: based on the purpose and objectives, what are the expected outcomes for the research? Hypotheses are fundamentally predictions about the answers to the research question and its component parts. The research hypotheses are a critical element of the research Project: they will guide the literature review; heavily influence the research methodology needed to obtain data that will either support or reject the hypotheses; and provide the focus for data analysis, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

Summary of Remaining Chapters: include a brief summary of the first chapter and describe the content of the remaining chapters. If a preface is utilized, this subsection is not needed.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The second chapter should not be confused with the Introduction in Chapter I. The introduction provides a review of the topic; the Literature Review summarizes what has been said about the topic. The Literature Review is not a series of book (or journal article) reports. A good literature review tells a story about the topic, using published works to support what is written. The chapter should be organized in such a way as to (a) bring together the most important writings about the research question in general, followed by (b) a closer examination of the writings related to the component parts detailed in the Purpose and Objectives subsection of Chapter I. It is very helpful to the reader if the ideas are presented in the same order throughout the Project.

This chapter will contain the greatest number of citations, so it is important that they be done correctly. Each citation must have a corresponding listing in the Reference section.

The Literature Review should not include data that will be used to answer the research question or test your research hypotheses. If the Project is utilizing an analysis of published research to answer the research question, the Literature Review should provide the background and take the reader up to the point where those studies begin.

**Students are cautioned not to use studies in this section as well as in chapter IV. Do not use this section to tell the reader what information is going to be in chapter IV, use it to talk about prior findings in research.

Chapter III: Methodology

In general, this chapter describes how the data were collected that answers the research question and its component parts. It is important to utilize appropriate methods of data collection in order to be able to hold up or reject the research hypotheses. This chapter should begin with a description of the research methods used in the research, including a description of the dependent and independent variables, if any. There will not be any original data collection, as you will all use secondary data.

Chapter IV: Results

This chapter includes a presentation and analysis of the data, not how the data was collected. The tone of the chapter is purely objective, devoid of assumptions and interpretations.

Chapter V: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter involves (a) a discussion of the research Project, including the findings, interpretation of the results, and problems and/or limitations; (b) a conclusion: what did the author find? What did the author learn? And (c) recommendations for changes in policy or practice, future research, or anything else that will direct solutions to the problem(s) that were the focus of the research.

Endnotes

Endnotes supplement or amplify information in the text. They should be used sparingly: if the information is of central importance, it should be included in the text; if the information is irrelevant or nonessential, it should be excluded; however, if the information is tangential, and more fully develops an element of the text, endnotes may be appropriate. Endnotes can be included at the end of each chapter or at the end of all the text. Appendix or Appendixes

The main purpose of the appendix (or appendixes) is (are) to provide detailed information that would be distracting if presented in the text. For example, a survey instrument or questionnaire, a data collection form, or a list of variables would be appropriate for placement in an appendix.

References

Only those works cited in the text appear in the Reference section and, conversely, every work in the Reference section must appear in the text. The Reference page is always the last section of the manuscript. Appendixes should come before the references. The last page of the references should be the last page of the manuscript. It is important to properly cite all references according to the APA manual 5th edition. Further, students must properly cite tables, charts and so forth according to the APA manual.

Index

An index can be extremely useful, but also difficult to create. Consider including an index only if word processing software facilitates its creation.

Section 2: Format for Text

Style

The Public administration program, has adopted the style of the American Psychological Association (APA). While there are a number of style manuals available, all Capstone Projects must conform to APA style as described in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th Edition). It is the responsibility for students to make sure their Project conforms to the APA style. The title page is specific to National University, and therefore does not use running headers.

Margins

Standardized margins are required on every page to ensure that no part of the Project is cut off when it is bound and trimmed. Copy machines and printers may shift text on a page. Therefore the following are minimum margins:

Left: 1 inch
Right: 1 inch
Top and Header: 1 inch measured from top of page to top of page number

Bottom and Footer: 1 inch measured from bottom of page to bottom of page number

Line and Word Spacing

Double spacing, left margins, is required except where the style calls for single spacing (refer to APA Manual). Widows (the last line of a paragraph as the first line of a page) or orphans (a heading or the first line of a paragraph as the last line on a page) are not acceptable. Words must not be divided in a way which leaves one letter of the word on either line or the past tense ed of a verb at the end of the first line. APA calls for only one space between words. Lengthy quotations (a prose quotation of two or more sentences which runs to five or more typewritten lines) must be in block form, single-spaced, intended five spaces from the margin on both sides, and not enclosed in quotation marks (see style manual for specific details) Care must also be taken to observe all rules for making omissions in the quotation, including omission of the beginning of the first sentence of a new paragraph in the quoted source.

Punctuation

Many common manuscript problems involve punctuation. Selecting committee members who are good writers and who are familiar with APA style can alleviate most of these problems.

Pagination

Every page must be counted in the numbering. With the exception of the title page, a number must appear on every page. Placement of page numbers must be consistent throughout and fit within the margins. Page numbers for preliminary pages using Roman numerals appear centered at the bottom of the page; pages using Arabic numerals appear in the upper right edge of the paper, one inch from the right edge and one inch from the top.

Chapters

Each chapter must begin on a new page. Chapters should be numbered. Refer to the APA Style Manual for different styles of headings.

Section 3: Illustrations

The purpose of illustrations (drawings, photographs, diagrams, maps, tables, plates, etc.) is to present information more clearly than can be done with words. Legends or titles should be self-explanatory, concise, and consistent in form with APA. Refer to the APA Style Manual for specific details.

Tables

The term “table” applies to numerical and statistical data set in vertical and horizontal alignment. Tables over half a page in length should be placed on a separate page. Tables too wide to be accommodated on one page may be typed on two or more pages, pasted together, and

either folded or reduced to page size by a suitable photographic process. Lengthy tables should be placed in the Appendix.

Footnotes for tables are to be indicated by standard symbols (*, etc.) or lower-case letters (a, b, etc.). Do not use numbers for footnotes to tables. Footnotes are placed at the bottom of the table, not the bottom of the page.

Sample of Title Page for Capstone Project

YOUR TITLE

A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Month 2016

By

Jane E. Doe

Capstone Project Faculty Advisor

Dr. Davodi-Far