

PA 7960 (5719) Capstone: Data and Information

Thursday, 5:30-8:45

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Introduction

The collection, management, and use of information is now taking center stage as a solution to improving decision making, increasing transparency and accountability, and engaging citizens. You do not need computer skills or quantitative analytical skills to succeed in this course.

This capstone is client-focused and we are working on scoping three projects that will have approximately five students in each group. The focus of the class is on producing a report to the client that includes action recommendations to deal with the client's problem. Groups will be guided through this process using a structured, step-by-step consulting process. Much of the work will involve identifying the client's problem, scanning for best practices from around the world, creatively matching up some of these practices to the client's needs while drawing upon your core course work in how to implement these recommendations.

What you will experience and learn in this course

We will be working with the City of Dublin, Information Technology Department. This is a great group to work with as this department is committed to providing and supporting educational opportunities to our students.

Working on an applied, client-focused project will provide skills that complement what you have learned in the classroom. As a "consulting project" you will learn how: 1) to work with the client in further defining a problem; 2) to tolerate ambiguity, 3) to develop creativity in coming up with useful recommendations, 4) to sharpen your communications skills in closely listening to your client's needs, and 5) how to manage a project that has real-life implications.

For many of you, this will be a first time that you work on a real-life problem. By doing this in a class, you will have support from both the instructor and the client who are interested in your success. You get to practice these skills in a relatively safe space before you head out into the professional world.

Finally, you will have a product that you can be proud of, and one which showcases a skillset and conceptual understanding of an increasingly important set of questions now being faced by government and nonprofit organizations – how to manage data, information, and knowledge.

The Projects

These are not finalized, but they do represent the kinds of problems you could be working on. *I am still working on other possible capstone projects.*

1. Open Data

Open data is public data that an organization makes easily available to its citizens through a web portal. The data can relate to anything that the public would find useful including, among other things, increasing transparency, improving economic development, or engaging citizens in government. The data could be about police or criminal activity, the budgeting process, or after-school educational programs.

Dublin now provides open data on its web portal. It has invested time in assembling this data and is now working on identifying additional datasets. What process or framework would help guide that decision process? Some of the important considerations on what data to provide include how the City can measure value to the community for the time and effort expended? Are there other public values besides monetary value?

A second set of possible questions involve how that data should be provisioned. Should the data be provisioned through a website or is a more proactive approach required? One creative solution could be to create “data concierge” services that provides one stop services that integrates data to meet the needs of a citizen - customer.

2. Knowledge Management

When an employee retires after 30 years, a great deal of knowledge is lost unless there are systematic efforts to formalize it. This is an especially important issue as there will be many retirements in the work force within the next ten years.

Knowledge management, however, is a much broader concern as it applies to all employees within the organization. Most knowledge is in people’s heads. How do we identify where important knowledge, experience, or expertise now resides in the organization? How do we capture it or point to it? How do we capture lessons learned so that institutional knowledge is more than “we have always done it that way” to now include the “why”?

3. Data Management and Information Management: Next Steps

Cities are increasingly recognizing the central importance of data in decision-making. This project will examine how local governments can EXPLICITLY and SYSTEMATICALLY manage information across the many units within government. Information now sits in silos and “information islands” and is often of little use to other units of government. For example, how

can efforts to lure a new company be supported by making information easily available on educational opportunities, traffic, and parks and recreation for a particular neighborhood?

Course Expectations

Expectations of Students

You will need to interview persons outside of the class hour and most likely during the day.

The life of a consultant involves spending time on your project that could vary from week to week and, in many cases, these demands are not fully predictable.

You will need to be especially mindful of professional etiquette and be respectful of the client's time by doing your homework.

There will be uncertainty and ambiguity during the semester. This is not a set of homework assignments that will always have clear directions, a clear problem, and a clear solution.

You will need to manage and support your group members by finding and working with their strengths and weaknesses.

You are responsible for asking questions and ultimately delivering a final, quality product.

Expectations of Instructor

The instructor is here to support your efforts. The instructor is here to support you in multiple ways including, among other things, editing and writing, coaching on professional etiquette, references to important literature, and handling stress when it will show up.

The instructor will respond to requests within 24 hours.

Expectations of the Client

The client will devote, at a minimum, three in-person meetings with the group: 1) the initial contact to further refine problem scope; 2) a check-in at the early to mid-semester mark; and 3) attending a professional presentation to the client and whomever the client deems might be interested in the results. The client may agree to additional meetings but this is not expected of the client.