

## **Beyond the Capstone: Incorporating professional competency training from orientation to graduation**

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### **Abstract**

This presentation and discussion will share the lessons learned during the revision process and initial implementation of the modified Capstone seminar for graduating students in the Masters of Public Affairs and Masters of Public Policy programs at Brown University. Throughout the process, particular emphasis was given to the identification of key professional competencies required for a successful Capstone experience and transition to work. Initially, the Capstone Revision Committee envisioned an expanded course to include training in professional competencies. The eventual consensus, however, identified the need for training to begin as early as orientation, continue throughout the full two years of the programs, and be delivered in a variety of formats.

The Committee reviewed peer institution programs, conducted focus groups and surveys with graduate students, informally interviewed faculty involved in core graduate courses, and assessed a pilot client-based project specifically on criteria related to client engagement and project management skills. Overall, students felt well-equipped for client-based projects in regard to academic content and primary objectives. The process revealed, however, deficiencies in training in professional competencies. The final recommendation of the Committee included a continuing commitment to a group client-based project in the final semester (as opposed to a more research-oriented thesis option). Additional changes were proposed to better prepare students for work with clients. Rather than wait to orient students to client-based work solely through the Capstone, recommendations included the incorporation of training in professional competencies as early as orientation and through direct integration into some core academic courses. Initial implementation in the fall of 2012 suggests that the deliberate attention to professional competencies throughout the curriculum is welcome to students and beneficial to their learning and professional preparation.

The case study of the process at Brown University will serve as a starting point and guide for discussion and reflection in the larger group setting. A primary objective of the session is the identification of specific and essential professional skills not typically addressed in academic curriculums on a consistent basis. Further, we will discuss, brainstorm, and refine possible avenues to deliver such training and begin “mapping” skills to the appropriate delivery mechanisms for optimal training opportunities.