

PPOL 514 Public Management

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McCourt School of Public Policy
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Semester Project

The semester project will be a group project where you have some choices in terms of what you may choose to focus on. You will be asked to work with four to five other students. Think of yourselves as a team of consultants brought in to provide a frank assessment of a public management problem for a particular client and recommend a tailored solution to this management challenge. You will first find an organization and identify some management challenges the organization is facing. Next, you will choose to focus on one management challenge, apply ideas and concepts from the course and develop an argument for why your proposal should be implemented by the client. For example, a problem of interest might be high rates of worker absenteeism in a specific government agency (federal, state, or local); addressing how to get two organizational units to collaborate effectively; improving equitable service delivery; reducing administrative burdens for service delivery; changing a toxic organizational culture and so forth.

You should frame the management problem as a research question to be investigated. Your group will put together a compelling proposal designed to convince management at the agency that they should implement your intervention, detailing both how to deploy it and how to measure its effectiveness.

You can consult with your professor on how to frame the management problem as a research question and for input on what sort of theories and evidence might be useful to answer it.

Group Project Deliverables:

The group project will be divided into four parts. All group members must contribute towards the final project, but the responsibilities can be divided between the parts as you all see fit.

1. Class PPT presentation (2 points)
 - a. You are expected to prepare a 10-minute presentation to the class presenting an outline of your semester project, which should include a brief overview of your policy context, the specific organization under investigation, the management challenge, the interviewees confirmed, responsibilities of group members, your plan moving forward, as well as any questions you have for me and/or the class to help your group progress. You should submit your PPT presentation in advance of class.
 - b. This meeting will take place during the class period approximately halfway through the semester.
 - c. After each group presents, I will ask the class to reflect on and respond to the following questions:
 - i. What advice would you give to this group as they move forward?
 - ii. Given the management problem they identified, do you have additional suggestions on ideas/concepts/theories they should look into?
 - iii. What additional information should they explore or find out during interviews or when conducting background research about the organization and problem in order to develop a solution?

- d. It is expected that by this presentation an organization will have been chosen already and interviews confirmed (if not already conducted).
2. Final presentation (5 points)
 - a. This presentation will be a chance to provide an in-depth overview on the client, management problem and your proposed intervention. Sufficient time should be spent on the proposed intervention, demonstrating your groups knowledge of the pros and cons in addition to why this most effectively addresses the problem. Each group is allotted 20 minutes – we estimate 15-minute presentations and 5 mins for Q&A. Presentations will take place during the last week of class.
3. Final paper (25 points)
 - a. The paper should generally be **12-15 pages double-spaced with 12-point font, and 1-inch margins** though you may go longer if you avoid repetition (due the last week of class). The paper should include the following key sections:
 - i. Policy context and client setting
 - ii. Management problem
 - iii. Proposed intervention
 - iv. Implementation strategy
 - v. Evaluation plan
4. Self and peer assessment/reflection (3 points)
 - a. At the completion of the group project, you will be required to conduct a self-reflection a peer-assessment of your other group members. This assessment will only be shared with me and will help to me grade everyone's contribution and participation to the project. You are encouraged to provide an honest and open evaluation of your peers. Anyone regarded as shirking their responsibilities will be scored a grade level lower on the project than other members.

Guide to Interviewing for Course Paper

To complete your paper, you will necessarily have to interview someone at the organization.

1. Start by introducing yourself. Explain who you are, what class this is for and what the project involves. Example: "I am a graduate student studying public management issues. For one of my classes I am writing a paper on workforce communication in prisons."
2. Explain why they are being interviewed and the distribution of their comments. Example: "I want to interview you because you have experience managing a prison. Your comments will be used only for a class paper and will not be used or quoted outside of a classroom setting." It is helpful if you have the name of someone they know who suggested you contact them. You should never do anything that violates the trust of an interviewee.
3. If you are taping their remarks seek their permission. Bear in mind that interviewees tend to more reticent if a tape recorder is running.
4. If you are not taping the interviewee keep careful notes. Use key words or phrases to get the general flow of conversation. Immediately upon finishing the interview write up your notes. You will be surprised how much additional information will come back to you. The longer you wait to write your interview notes, the less you will retain.
5. Have a list of questions written up in advance. For most research situations your interviewing style will be semi-structured. This means you have some specific topics you want to cover, but that you are not administering a survey of standard questions. If the interviewee says something intriguing, you have the free

6. Try to know your questions so you do not have to read them out, but rely on your list of questions only if you lose your train of thought. The more the interview feels like a conversation, the better the exchange of information.
7. Ask questions your interviewee can answer. Do not talk about theory and do not use academic language. Figure out the simplest and shortest language needed to ask the question. If you have long or verbose questions you will alienate the interviewee, and reduce their time and ability to respond. The hard part of writing interview questions is to translate complex theoretical ideas to simple questions.
8. Do not have too many questions that you feel compelled to cover. A handful of broad questions can suffice for a very long interview, as long as you are ready with appropriate probes or follow-ups. Example “how might communication be improved in this organization?” can elicit lots of information about a) what problems the interviewee perceives and b) possible solutions. You should be ready to ask follow-up questions that delve their responses. Be ready to be flexible and pursue the insights the interviewee is giving you even if it is not what you expected, as long as it is consistent with the general topic you are trying to answer.
9. Try to make your questions, especially your follow-up questions, very grounded and very specific. For instance, “How did the Governor react to that decision?” is better than “How did your environment react to that decision?” If you ask abstract questions you will tend to get more abstract answers. If you force interviewees to think about their daily activities as they answer questions, it is more likely they will give an accurate response. There are two ways to make this happen. First, when an interviewee makes a general point, always seek examples. Second, ask lots of other types of “probes” or follow-up question, e.g., “why do you think that happened?” “who benefits most from new reforms” “what do you think are the problems with the policy” “how does this problem impact your job?”
10. An interview should start gently and get the interviewee talking. A good opening is to ask the interviewee how they came to their current position, to give a short bio, or to describe their daily activities.
11. Try to find the least offensive way of asking a question. For instance, instead of saying “What are the major problems with the organization?” ask “what aspects of the organization do you think could be improved in the future?” A general rule of thumb for surveys or interviews is to hold the more contentious questions toward the end.
12. If you want to get more interviewees, you might ask your interviewee if they could name a couple of people that they think would be well-placed to answer the questions that you have.

Breakdown of Final Paper:

1. Policy context and client setting: You should describe the policy context broadly and research your client setting in detail. This information should be gathered from online searches, background reports, in addition to conducting interviews with key personnel at a given organization. This section should also include a thesis statement with summary of the problem to come and proposed solution.
2. Management problem: You should provide in-depth details on the problem you identify. You should show a comprehensive grasp of the management problem and its public service implications. Why is this an important problem to focus on? What effects is it having in the organization? What do we know from research about this problem? You should consider alternative theoretical approaches, research, and evidence (incorporating course concepts).

- a. Note: Please include a list of the interview questions asked (not the answers) in the appendix and the names/titles of individuals your group interviewed (which will not count toward the page limit)
3. Proposed intervention: An intervention can be an approach, a strategy, or a specific solution. You should exercise creativity and innovation when designing an intervention. You should include a brief review of relevant research, theoretical approaches, evidence, past evaluations and best practices to demonstrate what we know about this proposed intervention. You should provide a compelling argument that communicates why this is the best intervention to address the management challenge and incorporate course concepts.
4. Implementation strategy: You should discuss the important milestones that need to occur in order to successfully implement the proposed intervention. Your paper should make a convincing case that your plan will be effective. Who needs to be on board in order for successful implementation? What resources are required to accomplish implementation (e.g., funding, staff time, training, supplies, technology, equipment, space, collaboration with partners etc.)? What are potential barriers to successful implementation and how can they impede the goals of the intervention?
5. Evaluation plan: You should briefly note the methods that could be used for evaluating the intervention. How you will know whether your proposed intervention adequately addresses the management problem? What type of evaluation will you conduct? Are there short- and long-term indicators that might be helpful to measure success? What types of data might be needed?

Disclaimer: On the final page of your paper, write the following disclaimer: “This report was generated for the educational benefit of its student author(s) and the main purpose of the project was to learn managerial techniques. The opinions and suggestions in this report do not represent the views of Georgetown University or its faculty.”

References should be included and this will not count toward your page limit. You should include references to the readings and demonstrate your grasp of the course content, theories, and concepts. You should feel free to include tables or graphics as you deem necessary to best convey the information. Your final product should be free of grammatical and spelling errors. This is a group project and should be ONE voice, so please make sure you read and reread thoroughly.

All assignments should be submitted through Canvas on the day it is due. Any late papers will receive points taken off for each late day.

Note on Group Work:

Being in a group involves some additional coordination costs, but it has benefits – you can divide up and peer review each other work, and generally results in a more thoughtful analysis. It is in your interests to create a team environment characterized by civility, mutual respect, fair allocation of effort, clear goals and deadlines, and follow-through. A good start would be to create a set time where you will meet every week to discuss the project.

Tip: the primary difference between groups that score well on the semester project, and those that do not, is organizing early, and meeting with your professor frequently. This will help you to quickly identify your project, narrow down a research question, and identify relevant literatures to draw on.

Grading Scheme

Points	Policy context and client setting
5	<i>Student clearly articulates the importance of the policy context and the specific client setting. Student demonstrates in-depth knowledge and a comprehensive analysis including all relevant background information, facts, and. Student includes a thesis statement that clearly brings focus to the discussion, summarizes the problem and outcome of the project, and compels the reader.</i>
3	<i>Student provides subpar details on the policy context and client setting, lacking sufficient details and background information to fully understand the setting. Thesis statement is vague, ill-defined, and/or demonstrates a lack of understanding</i>
1	<i>Student does not demonstrate a clear grasp of the context and setting, there are inconsistencies present with context and setting and the rest of the paper. Thesis statement is not included and student does not summarize the problem or outcome of the project well.</i>
	Management Problem
5	<i>Student fully identifies and addresses the key managerial elements of the problem in a meaningful way. The student includes supporting facts and evidence as to why this is the most important issue at hand. Displays deep grasp of class material and makes creative connections between different aspects of the course. Student includes a list of the interview questions asked (not the answers) in the appendix as supporting materials in addition to the names and titles of the people interviewed.</i>
3	<i>Student identifies and addresses some aspects of the problem but ignores other key components. Does not demonstrate mastery or comprehension of course content, independent thought or critical analysis. Does not include list of interview questions asked in appendix.</i>
1	<i>Student misunderstands the nature of the problem, does not situate within the policy context appropriately and does not include any reference to class concepts or relevant research.</i>
	Proposed Intervention
5	<i>Student presents innovative/interesting solutions and clearly addresses counterarguments convincingly. The student makes a strong case for one favored course of action, while displaying deep grasp of class material and makes creative connections between different aspects of the course. Recommended suggestions are well thought out, feasible, effective and realistic.</i>
3	<i>Student doesn't address articulate the intervention effectively or simply repeats material discussed in class and reading (without demonstrated mastery of comprehension, independent thought or critical analysis). Recommended suggestions are either not well thought out, feasible, effective or realistic.</i>
1	<i>Student is too vague with suggested solutions, does not incorporate any learnings from class, and does not connect intervention to problem identified.</i>
	Implementation Strategy
5	<i>Student presents a clear, thoughtful and feasible implementation plan, outlining major milestones needed to successfully implement the plan, and identifies potential barriers to implementation incorporating a plan to address them in advance. Student identifies key players needed to ensure successful implementation and relevant action steps for those key players. Student describes the resources needed to accomplish the tasks in a feasible manner.</i>
3	<i>Student outlines some milestones, key players and action steps, however, major ones that should have been accounted for are missing. Potential barriers to implementation are not adequately considered and only some needed resources are thoughtfully considered.</i>
1	<i>Student is too vague with suggested implementation steps, milestones and action steps do not align with policy problem and proposed intervention, does not include a discussion of key players or action steps, or does not properly account for necessary resources and feasibility.</i>
	Evaluation Plan

5	<i>Student clearly indicates what measures, outcomes, and data are needed to evaluate the success of the proposed intervention in addressing the management challenge. Thorough details are included that account for short- and long-term indicators, frequency of evaluation, data collection requirements and so forth.</i>
3	<i>Student identifies some measures, indicators and data that could be useful for evaluating the intervention, but does not include all the relevant details that clearly describes steps in an evaluation plan or feasibility in evaluating.</i>
1	<i>Student does not include outcome measures or the indicators identified do not match the management problem and proposed intervention. The details of the evaluation plan are not flushed out, indicating the students lacks understanding of the evaluation method selected.</i>
	<i>Structure and Writing</i>
	<i>Points can be taken off from each section for the structure and writing. Student's writing should be clear, succinct, logical and free of spelling and grammatical errors. No superfluous sentences or tangential material included. References should be properly cited throughout the entire project and course content/concepts should be woven throughout the project. Entire project should flow with one voice, despite having multiple authors.</i>
25	TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS