

ENVST.UA 900.001 -Environmental Studies Senior Capstone Seminar

Credits: 4.0

Location: Silver Center, Room 618

M 5:00-7:30pm

Instructor:

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Course Description

New Yorkers use and discard a staggering 10 billion disposable, single-use bags every year. Many of those bags are never recycled because there is a limited market for plastic bag recycling in the United States. Simply put, it is more costly and difficult to recycle a plastic bag than to produce a new one. As a result, New York City's Department of Sanitation estimates that they collect more than 1,700 tons of single-use bags in residential trash, spending our tax dollars—more than \$12 million per year—to dispose of it in landfills in other states. In response, there have been several City and State-wide legislative and regulatory efforts that aim to reduce single-use bag usage by either banning them or charging consumers a fee per bag. Starting in March 2020, NY State will prohibit the distribution of single-use plastic carryout bags, with limited exceptions. This state law also allows counties and municipalities to enact a five-cent fee on paper carryout bags. New York City has opted into this fee, which also takes effect in March 2020. Similarly, as of January 2019, New York City stores, food service establishments, and mobile food commissaries may no longer offer, sell or possess single-use foam food containers such as foam takeout clamshells, cups, plates, bowls, trays, and coolers. Additionally, manufacturers, distributors, and stores may no longer sell or offer for sale loose fill foam packaging (“packing peanuts”) in the city.

This capstone seminar will take a comprehensive look at plastic waste pollution and the advocacy campaigns, successes, and impacts to date of enacted legislation, policy approaches, and market incentives across U.S. and global cities. Students will build on the work of previous NYU Capstone teams to benchmark global efforts and identify strategies implemented by a variety of governments. Finally, students will evaluate and document the effectiveness of those strategies and identify gaps and areas for additional engagement in an effort to support existing local campaigns to decrease the amount of single-used plastics discarded annually by New Yorkers.

We will examine the power and structure of NY municipal and state governments and understand the role of interest and lobbying groups and private organizations, as critical parts of a bureaucracy through which environmental issues are shaped, managed and negotiated.

Goals/Learning Objectives

This class will familiarize students with the political, legal, economic, technical and scientific constraints of the policy advocacy process. Focusing on problem solving, students will be required to review and analyze the City's political landscape, implement an observational survey in New York City neighborhoods, present their findings and ideas in class, and devise methodology and criteria to prioritize additional plastic waste reduction strategies as a group. For the final project, students will apply the skills developed in the course and distill the information obtained through primary and secondary research to devise and present a robust analysis.

This capstone is designed to enhance critical thinking skills. Students will have many opportunities for analysis and discussion. Students will hone their analytical skills and discover more fully how they can be not just witnesses to environmental management and environmental policy, but actors in politics as well.

Format

This is a problem-based, project-oriented, interdisciplinary required course for senior Environmental Studies majors. The aim is to improve students' ability to synthesize and integrate material from a range of disciplines; to deploy diverse methodologies and vocabularies in a problem-solving context; to bring theoretical knowledge and skills to bear on practical problems; to work in teams with other students; and to communicate results to a variety of audiences.

Structure

Weekly class meetings plus additional informal meetings and survey implementation days. During class time we will emphasize group discussion of methodologies and research findings and will review work progress. Significant self-directed and independent work is expected as a key part of the course. Students are required to devote time to meet outside of class for group work on required assignments and survey activities.

Course Requirements and Expectations

Policies and Expectations

As this is the culminating experience in your Environmental Studies major, the performance expectations for the Capstone Seminar are very high. “A” grades require a significant amount of inquisitiveness, self-initiated research, proactive learning, synthesis of research across multiple disciplines, and clear communication of complex, applied topics.

This is a research and reading-intensive course and students are expected to read, understand and critique any assigned or researched reading material, actively discuss it in class, and apply the practical and analytical skills learned during your undergraduate career to conduct thorough and thoughtful research. A “critique” is a summary *and* an evaluation of all readings activities—students are expected to compare and contrast related readings or activities, differentiate between facts and opinions, contemplate areas of agreement or contention with the given arguments and, finally, present summaries to the class and devise discussion questions for class.

Students will process a variety of materials, including technical assessments, newspaper articles, policy papers and industry reports. Students are expected to supplement the assigned readings to further obtain an understanding of the topics of the class. You should allocate sufficient time to schedule supplemental research and reading outside of class and beyond assigned readings. This supplemental research will be essential to support your individual and your team’s work on weekly and semester-long assignments.

Attendance and active participation are required in class. If you must be absent from class, you must inform me ahead of time, and complete all required readings or assignments, especially in support of your group members. Students must make every reasonable effort to not miss class on a day that an assignment is due. Finally, to do well in this class active participation is essential. Do not sit silently in class and expect to get an A—even if you earn As in all the rest of your assignments. If you feel uncomfortable speaking up in class, be extra thoughtful in devising discussion questions and articulating your reactions as you do the readings and be prepared to share them with the class.

Other Relevant Policies

- No extra credit—nothing you can do to improve your grade beyond *doing the assignments well and on time.*
- Plagiarism results in failure of the class. It includes: copying sentences or fragments from any source without quotes or references; not citing every source used in your papers; citing internet information without proper citation; presenting someone else’s work as your own; or “inadvertently” copying verbatim from any source.
- Lateness is unacceptable. Repeated lateness or absences will result in a lowering of your participation grade.
- Email is the easiest way to contact me (kcg4@nyu.edu or kizzycg@gmail.com). If you are experiencing problems of any kind contact me immediately. Please keep in mind that such problems cannot be claimed as reasons for failing to submit assignments or for submitting them late.
- Be considerate. No chatting, texting, or web-surfing will be tolerated in class.
- Office hours are by appointment only. I am available for in-person and conference call meetings.

Resources

- Access your course materials
 - [NYU Classes \(newclasses.nyu.edu\)](http://newclasses.nyu.edu)
- Databases, journal articles, and more
 - [NYU Libraries \(https://library.nyu.edu/\)](https://library.nyu.edu/)

- Strengthening your Writing
 - [NYU Writing Center \(https://www.nyu.edu/students/undergraduates/academic-services/writing-center.html\)](https://www.nyu.edu/students/undergraduates/academic-services/writing-center.html)
- Tutoring Support
 - [Academic Resource Center \(https://www.nyu.edu/students/undergraduates/academic-services/undergraduate-advisement/academic-resource-center.html\)](https://www.nyu.edu/students/undergraduates/academic-services/undergraduate-advisement/academic-resource-center.html)
- Technology Support
 - [NYU IT Service Desk \(https://www.nyu.edu/life/resources-and-services/information-technology/help-and-service-status.html\)](https://www.nyu.edu/life/resources-and-services/information-technology/help-and-service-status.html)

Academic Integrity

Again, work you submit should be your own. Please consult the CAS academic integrity policy for more information: <http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity>. Penalties for violations of academic integrity may include failure of the course, suspension from the University, or even expulsion.

Religious Observance

As a nonsectarian, inclusive institution, NYU policy permits members of any religious group to absent themselves from classes without penalty when required for compliance with their religious obligations. The policy and principles to be followed by students and faculty may be found here: [The University Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays \(http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/university-calendar-policy-on-religious-holidays.html\)](http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/university-calendar-policy-on-religious-holidays.html)

Disability Disclosure Statement

Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at [212-998-4980](tel:212-998-4980).

NYU's Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities

726 Broadway, 2nd Floor

New York, NY 10003-6675

Telephone: [212-998-4980](tel:212-998-4980)

Voice/TTY Fax: [212-995-4114](tel:212-995-4114)

Web site: <http://www.nyu.edu/csd>

Assignments

Project Teams and Topics

You will work in student teams. Each team will be assigned to research, develop and evaluate key topics of the class and key components of the team's final output. Each team's work will be similar in scope and will allow for integration and skill development across a range of concepts. Your job will be to collaborate on a set of tasks but to deliver ONE common output.

Four interrelated written assignments will be given: a Project Control Plan (PCP) and detailed protocol for an observational survey, a progress report and a final paper. All written work, unless otherwise noted, is due at the start of class time. Email submissions will not be accepted unless specifically requested in that format.

Assignments should be printed in double-sided mode, and formatted with 1-inch margins and 12-point font unless otherwise noted. Citations from peer-reviewed or published materials are essential and must be formatted as endnotes. <http://www.oberlin.edu/faculty/svolk/citation.htm>. There will also be several oral presentations over the course of the semester.

1) PROJECT CONTROL PLAN (PCP)

The PCP will include a detailed description of the team's work over the course of the term and which will culminate with a final paper and presentation. This work plan will explain your proposed team approach and will catalog and review the available and needed data, reports and literature. In essence, this write-up must answer the questions: What is the team trying to find out and how will it go about its research—analytically and logistically—over the course of the semester?

The goal is for the team to continuously produce a detailed work plan for collecting and analyzing the necessary information that advances each section of the project. This is the most critical early phase of a research project: a plan for how to manage the project. **Please see Page 7 of this syllabus** for a sample outline of a PCP. The PCPs should include most of the elements on the sample, though the sample is only a model. The PCP will include a list of tasks and an assignment of responsibilities for those tasks. In the PCP you will provide a clear and logical framework for the work you will do and the products and results you will deliver. Every PCP must include task assignments and due dates for the following outputs and milestones:

1. Detailed protocol for observational survey
2. Implementation dates and locations for observational survey
3. Progress report
4. Draft final report
5. Final report
6. Draft presentation to the capstone class
7. Final presentation to the capstone class

The PCP will be presented for discussion and comment on Monday, September 23rd, 2019 in class

2) PROTOCOL FOR OBSERVATIONAL SURVEY

The team will review the protocol for the observational survey that was provided by the BagItNYC coalition and which was enhanced and implemented by the Fall 2015 and 2016 NYU capstone teams. By conducting a full literature review, the team will improve upon and expand this protocol, articulate a clear explanation of the main research question, and provide a detailed justification for the study. In this write up, the team will consider the extent of the problem, its effects on health and the environment, and discuss why this study is appropriate; what the potential benefits are to New Yorkers; explain what the survey will add to the body of evidence already available; and discuss the feasibility of the study in terms of data availability, length, and methodologies used. Students will then devise a detailed implementation plan for the observational survey and by the end of the semester, the group will analyze and summarize survey findings.

The protocol will also be presented for discussion and comment on September 23rd, 2019 in class

3) PROGRESS REPORT

This report provides an update on the team's work to date; with the instructor as the audience. It provides a solid outline of the final paper, describes the team's findings and completed analysis to date, and outlines any challenges and issues encountered by the team; with a plan for addressing those challenges. Maximum length: 10 pages (5-double-spaced sheets of paper), with 1.5-spacing and 1-in margins.

The Progress Report will be presented for discussion and comment on November 11th, 2019 in class

**** TIP:** Even if writing assignments are divided to facilitate the assignment of writing responsibilities, the reports should be ONE cohesive, logical narrative. The team might choose one or more editors who are responsible for standardizing the language and tone of the report, with the input of the rest of the team.

4) FINAL REPORT

The final report allows the team to see the results of its work in a single format. It will consist of an executive summary, in which the team will integrate the semester's work and identify the major themes and findings of the project, and a more detailed description of the project's methodology and research approach, and the team's assessments, analysis, findings, recommendations and conclusions. More details will be provided in class. Maximum length: 20 pages (10-double-spaced sheets of paper), with 1.5-spacing and 1-in margins.

The final report is due on Monday, December 09th, 2019, by 5pm, via email

**** TIP:** When reviewing a draft report always ask: Is this (section, paragraph, sentence, word) needed to communicate the point? One way to ensure a succinct, but comprehensive, report is to develop a logical, detailed outline to think through the report before you begin writing. This is why you developed a final report outline in the progress report: the outline should be organized to answer the questions posed in the problem statement included in the PCP.

5) FINAL CAPSTONE PRESENTATION

Teams will deliver PowerPoint presentations to their peers, the NYU community and an audience on **December 09th, 2019 from 5-7:30pm (Monday)**. More details will be provided in class. These presentations will define the problems addressed by the project team, examine the process of problem-solving, evaluate outcomes of independent research, and discuss project team recommendations.

The work on these presentations must be distributed equally within the group. Students will be graded on quality, appearance and content of presentation; preparation, content and delivery of oral group presentation; strong responses to audience questions, objections, and concerns. A grading rubric will be provided.

CLASS PRESENTATIONS

In addition, students will be responsible for oral presentations on group progress as specified by the instructor. Details about the structure of the talks will be provided in class. Each group will be responsible for researching, understanding and summarizing assigned topics and for bringing up issues and questions to guide the class discussion. There are 3 in-class team progress presentations on October 21st and 28th and November 25th.

Assessment

20% quality of contribution to class discussion and team dynamics; and quality of in-class presentations

Active participation demonstrating comprehension and reflecting critical engagement with course materials, assignments, and readings are required in all classes. Student groups will be assigned to lead class discussions and prepare class presentations on key concepts, emerging themes and team progress. The 3 in-class presentations will be worth a combined 15 points. They take place on October 21st and 28th November 25th.

Your participation (5 points) will be evaluated according to the substance and regularity of your contribution to in-class discussions and to your group dynamics and group output, as well as respect for classmates, and support

for project team members' needs. Your effort will also be evaluated by receptivity to new skills and ideas, responsiveness to the feedback you receive, collaboration within groups, and a demonstration of your understanding of the subject matter expertise over the course of the term.

10% quality of PCP

20% quality and implementation of the Protocol for Observational Survey

10% quality of the Progress Report and presentation

20% quality of the Final Report

15% quality of the Final Presentation

5% 360 Review Process

Team Collaboration & Course Review

At the end of the semester, team members will each submit a write-up of their itemized contribution to the collaborative final project, including reflections on successes and challenges within the collaborative process in what is called a 360-review process. More details will be provided in class.

The final class grading will follow these guidelines:

A – Strong understanding of ideas, highly successful development of skills, thorough solutions to problems and projects, constructive classroom participation and timely submission of work.

B – Good understanding of ideas, successful development of skills, good solutions to problems and projects, regular classroom participation, and timely preparation and submission of work.

C – Inconsistent understanding of ideas, some development of skills, coherent solutions to problems and projects, some classroom participation, and sporadic preparation and submission of work.

D – Limited understanding of ideas, little development of skills, few solutions to problems and projects, poor attendance or participation, and sporadic preparation and submission of work.

F – No understanding of ideas or development of skills, poor attendance, skipped submission of work.

Weekly Schedule and Readings

September 09th —Session 1: Introduction to Course, Working in Teams, and Class Logistics

- Introductions, course overview and expectations, and assessment structure
- Capacity Building: “Managing teams” and “Developing work plans” presentations.

September 16th—Session 2: Trash and the City: Overview of policy campaigns

- Capacity Building: Trash and the City presentation
- Romer and Tamminen. 2014. “Plastic Bag Reduction Ordinances: New York City’s Proposed Charge on All Carryout Bags as a Model for U.S. Cities.” *Tulane Environmental Law Journal*. 27: 239-250. (provided)
- <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/04/plastic-bag-bans-kenya-to-us-reduce-pollution/>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/28/nyregion/plastic-bag-ban-.html>
- <http://www.attn.com/stories/2967/battle-over-plastic-bags>
- <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/site/resources/recycling-and-garbage-laws/collection-setout-laws-for-business/foam-ban> (click on & read the link on the DSNY determination of recyclability)
- <https://gothamist.com/news/11-fines-issued-in-first-day-of-nyc-foam-ban-enforcement>

Student-led work: Discussion of assigned readings

September 23rd —Session 3: Policy responses to plastic waste pollution

PCP DUE in class

- <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/191-19/mayor-de-blasio-signs-executive-order-end-city-reliance-single-use-plastic>
- http://www.teammarine.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Grocery-Store-Bag-Research_Press-Release-12-13.pdf
- <http://www.manhattanswab.org/nyc-foam-ban>

- Arango et al. Single-use plastic bags in New York City: An analysis of New Yorkers' bag use across four boroughs. NYU Capstone Report Fall 2015. (provided)
- Dahlbert et al. New York State Opposition to New York City Single Use Bag Fee: Review and Recommendations. NYU Capstone Report Fall 2016. (provided)

Student-led work: Discuss background research on observational surveys and evaluation of observational Survey Protocol (provided). Development of survey plan in class.

September 30th—Session 4: Responses to efforts to reduce plastic waste pollution

- Capacity Building: Briefing on Briefings
- <http://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2015/06/30/industry-referendum-delays-californias-plastic-bag-ban-until-november/>
- <http://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-plastic-bag-ban-0622-biz-20150622-story.html>
- BagItNYC Coalition. Browse: <http://bagitnyc.org> and explore: <http://bagitnyc.org/map/>
- Romer and Foley. 2012. "A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: The Plastics Industry's "Public Interest" Role in Legislation and Litigation of Plastic Bags Laws in California." Golden Gate University Environmental Law Journal. 5(2): 377. (provided)

Student-led work: Prep Observational Survey Implementation Week of October 7th 2019.

October 07th— Session 5: Observational Survey of New Yorkers

Student-led work: Prep Observational Survey Implementation Week of October 14th 2019.

October 14th — NO CLASS—FALL BREAK

Student-led work: October 15 legislative day: Observational Survey Implementation

October 21st –Session 6: Observational Survey of New Yorkers

Student-led work: Observational Survey Implementation and discussion of findings and next steps

October 28th– Session 7: Observational Survey of New Yorkers

Student-led work: Observational Survey Implementation and discussion of findings and next steps

November 4th—Session 8: Survey Debrief and Project Status Update

Student-led work: Discuss implications of survey results and research findings on policy recommendations.

November 11th—Session 9: Survey Debrief and Project Status Update

Project progress report and presentation of findings DUE in class: Present draft recommendations, including survey findings and feasibility analysis of proposed strategies.

Student-led work: Discuss implications of survey results and research findings on policy recommendations.

November 18th—Session 10: Draft Recommendations for New York City

Student-led work: Work on development of final report—instructor feedback on team progress

Capacity Building: Writing Final Reports--instructor feedback on progress report

November 25th—Session 11: Final deliverables

Student-led project workshop in class

- Deliver presentation of progress to date and analytical findings for instructor.
- Work on development of final report—instructor feedback on team progress
- Work on development of final presentation for next week's in-class dry-run

December 02nd --Session 12: Final deliverables

- Course Content Reflections/Final Thoughts/Class Wrap-up

Student-led work: Final Presentation in-class dry-run—instructor feedback

December 09th— Session 13: Final Presentations To NYU Community (20 minutes + 10 minutes of Q&A)

Final report and slides DUE via Email (kcg4@nyu.edu)

- 5-7pm. Location details to be provided.

EXHIBIT 1: OUTLINE FOR A WORKSHOP PROJECT CONTROL PLAN (SAMPLE PCP)

Although the project will often determine the specific nature of the report, generally, it may include:

I. Definition of the Research Problem: What is the project team trying to find out? —“Project Abstract”

II. Project Overview

- A. Description of Available Data and Literature
- B. Discussion of Data Needs
- C. “First Cut” of Study Design and Methodology
 - 1. How data will be collected
 - 2. Probable study hypotheses
 - 3. Draft analytic strategy
- D. Expected Result and Benefits

III. Brief Task Descriptions

- A. Develop Study Design and Methodology
 - 1. Develop survey instruments and/or other data collection strategies
 - 2. Develop project framework
- B. Collect Data
 - 1. Interviews (who, what, where, when, why, how)
 - 2. Literature review & other
- C. Analyze and Interpret Data
 - 1. Relate data to project outcomes
 - 2. Develop and implement final analytic strategy
- D. Develop Draft Report
 - 1. Summarize preliminary findings
 - 2. Outline draft report/Brief instructor
 - 3. Assigning writing tasks
 - 4. Edit draft report
 - 5. Develop and keep track of citations
- E. Develop Final Briefing
 - 1. Assign responsibilities and select draft submission dates
 - 2. Develop A/V materials
 - 3. Conduct dry runs
- F. Write Final Memo
 - 1. Write outline (Review with instructor)
 - 2. Assign writing tasks
 - 3. Edit final Memo

IV. Assignment of Responsibilities

- A. Project Manager and Deputy Project Manager
 - 1. Names
 - 2. Specific lead responsibilities
- B. Editor
 - 1. Name
 - 2. Specific lead responsibilities
- C. Research Coordinator and Briefings Coordinators
 - 1. Names
 - 2. Specific lead responsibilities
- D. Facilitator
 - 1. Name
 - 2. Specific lead responsibilities

V. Schedule of Tasks

- A. Table display of tasks, responsibilities, milestones and outputs