

<b>ENVST.UA 900.001 -Environmental Studies Senior Capstone Seminar</b>		
<b>Credits: 4.0</b>	<b>Location: 7 East 12<sup>th</sup> St, Rm 125</b>	<b>M 5:00-7:35pm</b>
<b>Instructor:</b>	<b>Kizzy Charles-Guzman</b>	<b>kg4@nyu.edu</b>

---

### 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, several city council members and a variety of groups are backing a new City Council bill that aims to reduce paper and plastic bag usage by charging consumers ten cents per bag at most stores.

This capstone seminar will take a comprehensive look at the advocacy campaign being led by BagItNYC to enact this legislation in New York City and evaluate the plausibility of strategies that can build upon and expand existing efforts to decrease the number of bags that are discarded annually by New Yorkers. In support of the BagItNYC coalition, students will adapt a detailed protocol for and implement an observational survey of what carryout bags New Yorkers are currently using at key retailers. Understanding what percentage of the bags currently being used are plastic/reusable/paper will help make the case for the bill to elected officials and it will also provide baseline data to compare the number of single-use bags being used after a bag charge legislation goes into effect. The survey protocol that students will evaluate and improve upon is based on the one used in Santa Monica, CA. Students will also work collaboratively to identify strategies implemented by a variety of advocacy organizations and by NYC government and identify gaps and areas for additional engagement.

We will examine the power and structure of NYC municipal government and understand the role of agencies, interest groups, and private organizations, as critical parts of a bureaucracy through which environmental issues are shaped, managed and negotiated. Over the course of the fall, hearings, events, forums, or activities may take place throughout New York City, providing unique opportunities for students to participate in and learn about environmental theory and practice related to solid waste management and plastic waste pollution.

### 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 key neighborhoods in New York City, present their findings and ideas in class, and devise methodology and criteria to prioritize additional 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. [For more detail, please refer to the "Letter to Capstone Students" from the ES Program Directors.]

## Structure

Weekly meetings, additional informal meetings and events as needed. During class time we will emphasize group discussion of readings and research findings and will review the progress of work. 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.

## 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 will result in a lowering of your participation grade.
- Email is the easiest way to contact me ([kcg4@nyu.edu](mailto:kcg4@nyu.edu) or [kizzycg@gmail.com](mailto: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.

## Assignments

### *Project Teams and Topics*

You may work in student teams. Each team may 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), a 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>.

### 1) PROJECT CONTROL PLAN (PCP)

The PCP will include a detailed definition and description of the topic which will be researched and developed throughout the term and which will culminate with a final paper and presentation. This 2-page, single-spaced summary will explain your proposed team work plan and will catalog and review the available 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 team will also produce a detailed work plan for collecting and analyzing the necessary information needed to advance 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 be a mixture of prose and outline and 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 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015 in class**

### 2) PROTOCOL FOR OBSERVATIONAL SURVEY

The team will evaluate the protocol for the observational survey that has been provided by the BagItNYC coalition. By conducting a full literature review, the team will improve upon this protocol, articulate a clear explanation of the main research question, and provide a detailed justification for the study and a discussion of its feasibility. 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 and the BagItNYC coalition; 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 will analyze and summarize survey findings.

**The protocol will be presented for discussion and comment on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015 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, with 1.5-spacing and 1-in margins.

**The Progress Report will be presented for discussion and comment on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015 in class**

**\*\* TIP:** Each writing assignment should be divided into distinct units to facilitate the assignment of writing responsibilities. Every member of the group should be given responsibility for writing the first draft of one section of each report. The team's editors are required to write the first draft of a report's introduction and conclusion. The team's editors will be 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.

**The final report is due on Monday, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015, 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 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015 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, student groups will be responsible for oral assignments on topics specified by the instructor. Details about the structure of the talks will be provided in class. Each person or group will be responsible for researching, understanding and summarizing the assigned topic and for bringing up issues and questions to guide the class discussion.

#### **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, themes and selected readings.

Your participation 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.

5% quality of PCP

20% quality and implementation of the Protocol for Observational Survey

10% quality of the Progress Report

25% 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 14<sup>th</sup> —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 21<sup>st</sup>—Session 2: Trash and the City: BagItNYC policy campaign**

- Intro 209-2014 text (provided)
- Intro 209-2014 Disposable Bag Bill NYC Council Hearing Testimony (92 pages—provided)
- BagItNYC Coalition. Browse: <http://bagitnyc.org> and explore: <http://bagitnyc.org/map/>
- Read: <http://www.attn.com/stories/2967/battle-over-plastic-bags> and <http://www.nyenvironmentreport.com/plastic-bag-bill-lives-despite-mayors-ambivalence/>
- [http://www.teammarine.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Grocery-Store-Bag-Research\\_Press-Release-12-13.pdf](http://www.teammarine.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Grocery-Store-Bag-Research_Press-Release-12-13.pdf)
- Student-led discussion with Jennie Romer—BagItNYC Coalition Coordinator

#### **September 28<sup>th</sup> —Session 3: Trash and the City: Policy responses to plastic waste pollution**

##### **PCP DUE in class**

- Capacity Building: Intro to NYC Government 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)
- 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)
- <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>
- <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/local-news/20150607-some-shoppers-hail-end-of-dallas-bag-fee-but-many-see-need-to-fight-litter.ece>

#### **October 5<sup>th</sup>—Session 5: BagItNYC Observational Survey Protocol**

- Team discusses their background research on observational surveys
- Evaluation of observational Survey Protocol (provided)
- Development of survey plan

#### **October 12<sup>th</sup>—NO CLASS—FALL BREAK**

**October 19<sup>th</sup> — Session 6: Observational Survey of New Yorkers**

Student-led discussions: Observational Survey Implementation—findings and next steps

**October 26<sup>th</sup> –Session 7: Observational Survey of New Yorkers**

Student-led discussions: Observational Survey Implementation—findings and next steps

**November 2<sup>nd</sup> – Session 8: Observational Survey of New Yorkers**

Student-led discussions: Observational Survey Implementation—findings and next steps

**November 9<sup>th</sup>—Session 9: Survey Debrief and Project Status Update**

- Project progress report DUE in class: Student-led project workshop in class—present draft recommendations, including survey findings and feasibility analysis of proposed strategies
- Student-led project workshop in class
  - Discuss implications of survey results and research findings on recommendations for BagItNYC coalition

**November 16<sup>th</sup> --Session 10: Draft Recommendations for BagItNYC Coalition**

- Capacity Building: Writing Final Reports: A Few Tips and Briefing on Briefings
- Class Speaker: *Anne Rademacher*—Reactions and feedback on draft recommendations. Anne is Associate Professor of Anthropology and Environmental Studies at NYU
  - Work on development of final report—instructor feedback on progress report

**November 23<sup>th</sup>—Session 11: Final deliverables**

- Student-led project workshop in class
  - 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

**November 30<sup>th</sup> --Session 12: Final deliverables**

- Student-led project workshop in class with client—*Jennie Romer*
  - 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 7<sup>th</sup>— Session 13: Final Presentation Dry-Run**

- Course Content Reflections/Final Thoughts/Class Wrap-up
- Final Presentation in-class dry-run—instructor feedback

**December 14<sup>th</sup>— FINAL PRESENTATIONS TO NYU COMMUNITY (20 minutes + 10 minutes of Q&A)**

Final report and slides DUE via Email ([kcg4@nyu.edu](mailto:kcg4@nyu.edu))

- 5-7pm. Location details to be provided. Presentations must be emailed and posted

**Possible events:**

International Coastal Clean-Up Day--September 19, 2015 is the Ocean Conservancy International Coastal Clean-Up Day. Numerous NYC-based groups are hosting clean-ups in and around NYC. Team can focus on plastic bags as a problematic source of beach litter.

Bag It film screening--Beth Kelly from United for Action may be hosting a screening of Bag It on the upper west side. This will likely be on the evening of Oct 30th. More details will be provided.

Bag Webinar—BagItNYC will be presenting at a "Bag the Bag in Your Community" hosted by Center for a New American Dream on Wednesday, September 23rd at 1pm EST. Link TBD.

## **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. Pose study hypotheses/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 study hypotheses
  - 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
  - 1. Name
  - 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