

PPL 891-001: Capstone Policy Workshop (3 credits)
Fall 2025—Tuesdays: 6:00 – 8:50 pm; South Kedzie Hall Rm 104

I. Course Instructor:

Marty P. Jordan, Ph.D.
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Dept. of Political Science
Email: jordan61@msu.edu

Office: 346 S. Kedzie Hall
Office Hours: Wed. (1:00-3:00pm) or by Appointment
(<https://msu.zoom.us/j/92461100332>) Pswd: **YesPLS**

***Please include PPL 890 in the subject line**
Pronouns: he/him/el

II. Course Description and Objectives:

Congratulations on reaching the Capstone semester in the MPP program! This course serves as an important bridge between the classroom and the practice of policymaking and policy analysis. PPL 891 builds on the program's core curriculum to provide an opportunity for students to integrate the knowledge and skills gained and apply theory to practice on a topic of the student's choosing.

Where previous courses in the MPP program have focused on building key quantitative and analytical skills—the “science” of policymaking—this course focuses on the “art” of applying those skills in dynamic, real-world conditions. Compared to a standard MPP seminar or quantitative course, this class will have less assigned reading. Instead, it is expected that you'll use the course reading as a guide, draw upon knowledge from other classes, and use your *own independent reading* for your Capstone project to be an engaged, thoughtful contributor to classroom discussion. You should be reading new things outside of the course assignments to build knowledge every week.

As such, this course is designed to achieve the following objectives:

- Apply knowledge and skills to a real-world policy, issue, need, situation, problem, or decision
- Communicate policy-relevant knowledge to diverse audiences in multiple formats
- Learn practical tools to successfully complete a final Capstone project and transition into effective policy practice

Class sessions will be a mix of seminar-style discussions, formal and informal presentations, and workshops. Each week covers a different skill that you'll use during the Capstone process. If you invest in learning those skills now, you'll build a foundation that you can rely on during the spring, no matter what surprises your Capstone throws at you. I will give you continual feedback on your work, and we will discuss your individual projects frequently throughout the semester so you'll feel fully confident in your project.

At the end of this course, you will have:

- A solid draft of your Capstone poster detailing your research question, data, findings, and policy recommendations.
- Numerous opportunities to communicate your research question, literature review, data, results, and recommendations to technical and non-technical audiences.
- A plan to finalize your Capstone poster and the confidence to present it in the Spring at the annual Capstone Policy Forum.
- Hands-on experience with the nonlinear, iterative nature of applied policy research, developing both the analytical rigor and creative problem-solving skills essential to navigating the science and art of real-world policy analysis.

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Fall 2025—Tuesdays: 6:00 – 8:50 pm; South Kedzie Hall Rm 104

III. Course Modality and Schedule:

PPL 891 is conducted IN-PERSON and combines weekly synchronous class sessions with independent asynchronous work outside of class. Synchronous Component: We will meet in person once a week for three hours. Class sessions will include lectures, workshops to develop your research, presentations of your findings, opportunities to provide peer review, and active learning exercises to apply research methods to your policy question of interest. Asynchronous Component: You will engage in independent work that includes reading assigned materials, conducting literature reviews specific to your policy topic, collecting and analyzing quantitative or qualitative data, and advancing your capstone research.

See the Course Requirements and Course Schedule sections for more details.

IV. Course Materials:

➤ Textbook and Readings:

No textbook purchase is required for this course. All assigned readings will be available as PDFs on D2L. However, you will need to print at least three versions of your capstone poster at the MSU Library during the Spring semester. The estimated cost is approximately \$25 per poster.

➤ Software and Calculator:

If you are planning to do a quantitative Capstone project, please plan to use the software program, Stata. Stata is available in both the computer labs and the library on campus. However, I have also requested that MSU provide you with access to Stata via MSU's Virtual Lab desktop.

To gain access to Stata via this route, first you must set up two-factor authentication via an app on your smart phone. Follow these instructions to set up two-factor authentication for the purposes of the Virtual Desktop: http://files.desktop.msu.edu/VDI-Docs/VDI_Two-Factor_Setup.pdf.

Once two-factor authentication is set up via the Symantec VIP app, go to <https://vdi.msu.edu>. You should be able to log in with your MSU netid and MSU password. You will then be asked for your two-factor authentication (from the Symantec VIP app). If a "Radius" code is requested, you should be able to type in "push" and that should gain you access. Once you log in you will see an icon for MSU Lab. Click the open button underneath it and it will open the desktop in another browser window. You can then use this much like the computer labs on campus, clicking on Stata on the desktop. If you need technical assistance with the Virtual Desktop at any time, you should call MSU's IT support at 517-355-2345; they provide excellent and speedy support.

Alternatively, rather than relying on the virtual access (which can be a bit clunky at times), you can also purchase your own copy of Stata at: <https://www.stata.com/order/new/edu/gradplans/student-pricing/>. Stata/IC is likely sufficient for our purposes in the MPP program, costing \$48 for a 6-month license, \$94 for an annual license, or \$225 for a perpetual license.

➤ Course Website:

The course website is Desire2Learn (hereafter D2L): <http://d2l.msu.edu>. You can access the additionally assigned readings and activities on D2L. Grades will be posted periodically on the course website. I will also announce schedule or course changes here. And, any problem set, research project, or mini-test submissions will be done electronically via D2L. Please check our course website on a regular basis. If you need technical assistance with D2L at any time, you should call MSU's IT support at 517-355-2345; they provide excellent and speedy support.

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Fall 2025—Tuesdays: 6:00 – 8:50 pm; South Kedzie Hall Rm 104

V. Course Requirements:

Your final course grade will be based on the following components and percentages. Your participation in the Capstone Policy Forum in the Spring is contingent on successful completion of this course.

RESEARCH MEMO #1: (5% TOTAL). Your first research memo should be a 3-page, single-spaced document that includes the following components: (1) your proposed research question; (2) discussion of why this research is important and relevant; (3) definition of the policy problem context you will investigate for your Capstone; (4) description of the methodology you plan to use to answer your research question; (5) identification of potential quantitative or qualitative data sources; and (6) explanation of how this project aligns with your personal career goals and interests. Students must also identify a potential Capstone mentor who can provide substantive topic expertise and/or methodological guidance. The mentor may be selected from MPP faculty or faculty in related fields. Additionally, students may choose to include committee members from outside the University.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY: (20% TOTAL). Identify 20-30 reputable sources (e.g., journal articles, government reports, news articles, think tank publications) pertaining to your capstone topic and proposed research question. For each source, provide a complete citation in Chicago, MLA, or APA style, followed by one to two paragraphs that address the following components: A. Summary: The source's leading theory or argument; B. Evidence: The data or evidence used to support that theory/argument; C. Methodology: The research method employed (e.g., experiment, observational study, qualitative interviews, meta-analysis); D. Key Findings: The primary contribution or findings most relevant to your research; and E. Critical Analysis: Any critiques, limitations, or gaps you identify from your perspective. You may also include relevant quotes that could be useful for your research.

PRESENTATION #1: (5% TOTAL). Midway through the semester, you will deliver a 7-minute presentation to your peers outlining your research question, policy context, proposed analytical approach, data sources, methods, descriptive statistics, and anticipated findings. This presentation is designed to help you clarify the core elements and structure of your project while strengthening your oral communication skills, building on the presentation training provided in class. In addition to presenting, you will offer constructive feedback on your peers' projects, fostering a collaborative environment for refining ideas and improving analysis.

RESEARCH MEMO #2: (20% TOTAL). Your second research memo should be a 5-7 page, single-spaced document that includes (1) your research question; (2) a brief summary of the significance of the problem and its relevance; (3) a brief summary of the history and political context of the issue, including any key stakeholders; (4) the methodology used to investigate the issue, including comparisons, models, criteria, and data sources; (5) the preliminary findings from your analyses; and (6) identifying any unresolved questions or challenges that remain. The assignment excludes recommendations and emphasizes analytical rigor, proper citation practices, and optional use of original tables or figures to support the analysis.

DRAFT POSTER & PRESENTATION #2: (15% TOTAL). Near the end of the semester, you will create a polished draft of your Capstone poster that showcases your research question, policy context, topic relevance, methodology, findings, and policy recommendations. The poster should feature compelling graphics and data visualizations that effectively communicate your analysis. You will present your project during a class session, receive feedback from your peers, and incorporate their insights into your final version. In addition to presenting, you will provide constructive feedback on your classmates' projects. You will also be required to submit the statistical code and data used to generate your findings and visualizations.

PPL 891-001: Capstone Policy Workshop (3 credits)
Fall 2025—Tuesdays: 6:00 – 8:50 pm; South Kedzie Hall Rm 104

FINAL DRAFT POSTER: (20% TOTAL). Your final draft research poster should succinctly communicate your research question, the importance of your project, the findings, and the policy recommendations. The final draft is due during the week of final exams with no exceptions. During the spring semester, you will work independently to refine and finalize your poster for the Capstone Policy Forum, scheduled for late March or early April (specific date and time TBD). A practice poster session will be held two weeks prior to the final presentation.

RESEARCH MEMO #3: (5% TOTAL). Your final research memo should be a 1-2 page, single-spaced document that includes three key components: (1) a summary of your capstone project, results, and key policy recommendations; (2) a reflection on what you learned from this process about your research topic, yourself as a researcher, and public policy more broadly; and (3) a detailed plan and timeline for refining and finalizing your capstone poster for presentation at the Capstone Policy Forum in late March or early April.

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION: (10% TOTAL). You are expected to attend all class sessions, be on time and prepared for class, and actively participate in class meetings. Everyone's experience in this course is enhanced by regular attendance and active participation; conversely, everyone's experience suffers if individuals do not attend and participate. If you miss a class, you bear the responsibility of getting notes, information about assignments, or changes to the syllabus from a classmate.

Your participation will be assessed based on: (1) involvement in and contribution to class discussions; (2) participation in and quality of feedback provided during peer-review exercises; (3) regular attendance and engagement in class sessions; (4) active participation in individual meetings with the instructor; (5) active participation in individual meetings with capstone mentors; (6) involvement in and contribution to practice poster presentation sessions; (7) professionalism and adherence to class norms; and (8) receptiveness to feedback and improvement throughout the semester.

Meaningful participation means being a good member of our class community. This does not include checking your cellphone, surfing the web, or chatting with your neighbor during class conversations or activities. Since everyone in the course will share works and ideas in progress, class discussions and conversations must be supportive, constructive, and open for the best ideas to emerge. Remember that a sincere question often adds as much to our understanding of the course material, so don't be afraid to speak up or seek help if you do not understand the course content. Any behavior that detracts from creating this supportive classroom environment will negatively affect your participation grade.

VI. Student Evaluation and Grading:

Grading Weights—your grade will be determined using the following weights:

• Research Memo #1—Proposed Research Topic:	5%
• Annotated Bibliography:	20%
• Presentation #1:	5%
• Research Memo #2—Preliminary Results & Findings:	20%
• Draft Poster & Presentation #2:	15%
• Final Poster:	20%
• Research Memo #3—Final Steps:	5%
• Attendance & Participation:	10%
• TOTAL:	100%

PPL 891-001: Capstone Policy Workshop (3 credits)
Fall 2025—Tuesdays: 6:00 – 8:50 pm; South Kedzie Hall Rm 104

Grading Scale:

4.0	90 – 100	2.5	75 – 79	1.0	60 – 64
3.5	85 – 89	2.0	70 – 74	0.0	Below 60
3.0	80 – 84	1.5	65 – 69		

VII. Course Outline:

The outline below is subject to changes; students are responsible for any changes I announce in class, via email, or on D2L. The readings and activities assigned to a date are for that day's class. You should be prepared to answer any questions about the material for that assigned day.

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNED READINGS & ACTIVITIES / DUE DATES
Week 1: August 26	Choosing a Capstone that's right for you.	Read: Jordan and Scott. (2025). The Spread of Symbolic Policies: Juneteenth, Interests, and Representation in the U.S. States. (D2L)
Week 2: September 2	Applied policy research	Read: Casey et al. (2018), A Cautionary Tail: A Framework and Case Study for Testing Predictive Model Validity. (D2L) Read: Doleac and Hansen (2020), The Unintended Consequences of "Ban the Box." (D2L) Read: Huseman et al. (2019), The Price of America's Inability to Track Child Deaths from Abuse and Neglect? Sometimes, More Lives. (D2L) Read: Klinenberg. (2018). The Other Side of "Broken Windows" (D2L)
Week 3: September 9	Writing for a policy audience and project management	Read: Policy Analysis in 750 words: Eugene Bardach's (2012) Eightfold Path (D2L) Read: Broman and Woo (2018) "Data Organization in Spreadsheets" (D2L)
Week 4: September 16	Capstone roundtable #1	Read: CDC's Policy Analytical Framework Example (D2L) Read: Smith (2016). Chp. 4: Evaluation: Analyze and Advise (D2L) Due: Research Memo #1
Week 5: September 23	Individual meetings	No Assigned Readings
Week 6: September 30	Quantitative methods and data visualizations	Read: The Truthful Art: Data, Charts, and Maps for Communication by Cairo (D2L) Watch: David Berliner Explaining Campbell's Law (D2L) Due: Annotated Bibliography
Week 7: October 7	Qualitative methods for policy analysis	Read: Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options by Seawright and Gerring (D2L) Read your assigned applied policy analysis article using qualitative methods
Week 8: October 14	Delivering captivating presentations	Read: Chp. 1: Theory, Planning & Design by Jonathan Schwabish, from Better Presentations: A Guide for Scholars, Researchers, and Wonks (D2L)
Week 9:	Fall Break	No Class – Continue working on your Capstone projects

PPL 891-001: Capstone Policy Workshop (3 credits)
Fall 2025—Tuesdays: 6:00 – 8:50 pm; South Kedzie Hall Rm 104

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNED READINGS & ACTIVITIES / DUE DATES
October 21		
Week 10: October 28	Presenting your Capstone Proposal & Peer Feedback	Due: Presentation #1
Week 11: November 4	Translating research into impact	Read: It's Not You, It's Me: When You Realize Your Reports, Not Your Readers, Are the Problem (https://depictdatastudio.com/your-reports-are-the-problem/). Read: Policy Briefs 101: A Guide for Translating Research Findings into Policy Impact (D2L) Due: Research Memo #2
Week 12: November 11	Individual meetings	No Assigned Readings
Week 13: November 18	Poster Lab Session	Review Data Visualization Resources on D2L
Week 14: November 25	Presenting your Capstone Poster	Due: Draft Poster and Presentation #2
Week 15: December 2	Individual meetings	No Assigned Readings
Week 16: December 9	Final Capstone Product	Due: Final Poster Due: Research Memo #3

VIII. Course Policies and Procedures:

Intellectual Property of Course Content: My lectures, notes, handouts, quizzes, essays, assignments, and displays are protected by state common law and federal copyright law. They are my own original expression or have been borrowed from colleagues who have given prior consent. Students are authorized to take notes in my class; however, this authorization extends only to making one set of notes for your own personal use and no other use. You may not copy course material, make a commercial use of them, or upload any course material to online study sites without prior permission from me.

Classroom Decorum: Politics and public policy can be controversial. And we will discuss controversial issues from time to time. I desire to create a space where meaningful and constructive dialogue is encouraged, and your opinions are shared. However, this requires from all of us mutual respect, a willingness to listen, and tolerance of opposing viewpoints. I expect that respect for individual differences and alternative points of view will be maintained at all times in this course. One's words and use of language should be tempered and within acceptable bounds of civility and decency.

Late Work or Make-up Assessments: I expect students to make every effort to turn in assignments or present on time and as scheduled. The only exceptions that will be made pertain to medical emergencies, participation in a College-sponsored event or activity, or observance of a religious holiday. If you know in advance you will miss such a requirement, you must notify me in advance. If you are ill or other extenuating

PPL 891-001: Capstone Policy Workshop (3 credits)
Fall 2025—Tuesdays: 6:00 – 8:50 pm; South Kedzie Hall Rm 104

circumstances cause you to miss a required graded activity, notify me as soon as possible and provide appropriate documentation (e.g., doctor's note) that allows me to verify the validity of your claim.

Communication with the Instructor: I care about you and your success in this course, at Michigan State University, and beyond. I welcome suggestions, comments, questions, and conversations about the course, policy studies, political science, graduate school, or the professional arena outside academia. Feel free to participate in my virtual office hours (office hours are listed above), set up an appointment, call, or email me. I will try to respond to all emails within 24 hours, although it may take longer on the weekends. I will also use email and our D2L site to frequently communicate with you about course assignments, activities, and any changes to the course schedule or syllabus.

Grade Appeals or Challenges: I am not infallible, and I occasionally make grading errors, including grading miscalculations. If you have a question or concern regarding your performance or standing in the course, I am happy to discuss this with you.

Academic Integrity: Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. All work is expected to be original, and not previously or simultaneously turned in for credit in another course (unless you get explicit permission from me beforehand). Relying on ChatGPT or other AI programs does not qualify as original content. Using these programs for coursework and the Capstone project is a violation of the academic integrity policy. All students at MSU are also responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policies of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism (including "patchwriting"), aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member (including but not limited to a zero for the assignment and/or course, being reported to the Dean's office) and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to probation, suspension, or expulsion from the university).

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities (from the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD): Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at www.rcpd.msu.edu. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a Verified Individual Services Accommodation ("VISA") form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc.). Requests received after this date may not be honored.

Religious Observation Policy:

<http://www.hr.msu.edu/documents/facacadhandbooks/facultyhandbook/religiousobservance.htm>

Sexual Harassment or Assault: Michigan State University and I are committed to fostering a culture of caring and respect that is free of relationship violence and sexual misconduct, and to ensuring that all affected individuals have access to services. For information on reporting options, confidential advocacy and support resources, university policies and procedures, or how to make a difference on campus, visit the Title IX website at www.titleix.msu.edu.

I am available if you would like to speak to me about an incident of sexual harassment or assault that occurred while you are a student at MSU. However, it is important to note that all MSU faculty members (and teaching assistants) are mandatory reporters through Title IX (the law that prohibits sex discrimination, which includes harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault and stalking). If you speak to me about a personal experience, I am required to report my knowledge of the incident to the Title IX coordinator.

PPL 891-001: Capstone Policy Workshop (3 credits)
Fall 2025—Tuesdays: 6:00 – 8:50 pm; South Kedzie Hall Rm 104

An additional resource to consider if you need one-on-one crisis support is the Michigan Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence's Voices4 Hotline. The Hotline provides confidential and anonymous support for all victims/survivors, their significant others, and those professionals who serve them in the state of Michigan 24 hours a day, seven days a week. These services are secure and available in real-time. You can reach the Hotline via phone, chat, text, or TTY (Teletypewriter).

Hotline: 1-855-VOICES4 (1-855-864-2374)

TTY: [517-381-8470](tel:517-381-8470)

Chat Line: <https://mcedsv.org/hotline/hotline-chat/>

Text Line: [1-866-238-1454](tel:1-866-238-1454)

Finally, Equal Rights Advocates has put together an excellent toolkit for survivors:
<https://www.equalrights.org/issue/student-survivor-toolkit/>.

Mental Health Services: Graduate students often experience issues that may interfere with academic success such as academic stress, sleep problems, juggling responsibilities, life events, relationship concerns, or feelings of anxiety, hopelessness, or depression. If you or a friend is struggling, we strongly encourage you to seek support. Helpful, effective resources are available on campus, and most are free of charge.

- Drop by Counseling & Psychiatric Services (CAPS) main location (3rd floor of Olin Health Center) for a same-day mental health screening.
- Visit <https://caps.msu.edu> for online health assessments, hours, and additional CAPS services.
- Call CAPS at **(517) 355-8270** any time, day or night.
- 24-Hour MSU Sexual Assault Crisis Line **(517) 372-6666** or visit <https://centerforsurvivors.msu.edu/>