

The George Washington University
School of Media and Public Affairs
Graduate Strategic Political Communication
Capstone Guidelines

Updated 5/21/19

The Strategic Political Communication Capstone project demonstrates the student's ability to apply fundamental political communication theory and skills and produce a professional strategic political communication plan. The Capstone is modeled after the Strategic Political Communication Practicum in which students work together to write and present a strategic communication campaign. The Capstone is the final opportunity to judge the student's ability to apply core theories to a practical setting. It is an individual project.

The output of the semester-long project is a 35-50 page strategic communication plan. Students are required to give a 20 minute presentation about their plan, followed by a question and answer session. Students should be in regular contact with their committee, and deliver a final draft strategic communications plan to the committee at least several days before the presentation.

Subject to discussion with advisors, core components of the final paper include:

- An Executive Summary briefly describing the nature of the problem and the central elements of the campaign. This "35,000 foot view" of the endeavor should summarize the campaign objectives, strategic environment, targeting, messaging, and strategy.
- Individual sections including:
 - Background Information
 - Goals
 - The method by which you will achieve your goal - passage of a new policy, implementation of a new program, or whatever is most appropriate
 - Resources
 - Allies and Opponents
 - Primary and Secondary Targets
 - Messaging
 - Tactics and Timeline
 - Budget and Fundraising Plan
- Sample campaign relevant documents, such as:
 - Sample petition (if the campaign calls for a petition)

- Sample tweets, Facebook posts, or other social media content (if the campaign includes a social media component)
- Sample press release (if the campaign includes earned media)
- Event agenda (if the campaign includes events)
- Budget and fundraising plan

The Committee will grade capstone projects on four main criteria:

1. The depth and breadth of the research. How well does the student communicate an understanding of the underlying strategic challenge?
2. Realistic assessment of the campaign plan. If this campaign was executed in reality, does the committee believe it would achieve its goals? If the committee were an organization deciding whether or not to fund this plan, would we adopt it or reject it?
3. Application of political communication theory. How well does the student articulate why s/he is making the strategic choices s/he is making?
4. Creativity.

Capstone project topics can take many forms. We encourage students to develop projects with clear applications in their intended field or for an issue in which they are especially interested. Some projects will take the form of a consultants' pitch, others will take the form of a grassroots campaign plan or intra-departmental proposal. We usually prohibit students from designing electoral campaigns and pure public awareness campaigns.

Students should meet with their committee early in the process to set expectations about the amount of academic support expected in the final presentation. For example, how much of the relevant literature about communication and the topic be included in the final document, and how should it best be incorporated?

Students are encouraged to share outlines and drafts of their final projects with their committee throughout the semester.