The Workshop in Development Practice

A. Introduction

The Workshop in Development Practice (U9001) is a required course for second-year master’s degree students in the Economic and Political Development (EPD) Concentration, and is open to selected students in other concentrations, at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA). The Workshop provides students with the opportunity to apply what they have learned from their coursework, internships and prior work experience to consulting engagements in the field of development. Students work in teams with a faculty advisor to assist clients on a wide variety of assignments in international development, human rights and related fields. The students bring a multidisciplinary approach to their work, reflective of their range of backgrounds, skills and professional and academic experiences.

B. Objectives of the Workshop

The Workshop is a unique experience. It provides an opportunity for students to apply what they have learned from coursework and past experience directly to challenging, real-life development projects. It also provides an experience in working with a team of diverse colleagues with a range of skills and experience. For faculty advisors of the Workshop, it is an opportunity to think about ‘teaching’ in different terms. Further, clients have consistently been pleased by the high quality of the work produced. A number of final reports have been published and circulated within the world of development policy and practice.

The Workshop aims to facilitate professional development and contacts. Among the skills emphasized are:

✓ problem identification and problem solving
✓ managing tasks/resources/time
✓ team management
✓ negotiation skills
✓ cross-cultural communication
✓ ability to assess organizational capacity
✓ data gathering (e.g., through interviews, focus groups, surveys and/or participatory techniques)
✓ data analysis
✓ presentation skills.

C. Design of the Workshop

The Workshop is a 3-point course that meets once a week in the spring semester. Students apply for the Workshop in late October and, if accepted, they must register for the course in January. Although registration is in January, the project work actually commences in November. There is a significant amount of work to be done from early November through January for all projects, and some project teams will carry out initial field work over the winter break. By applying for the Workshop, therefore, students are committing to a process spanning from November to early May. The Workshop entails much more time than a typical course. Students selected for a Workshop team are expected to schedule
their other courses, internships, personal travel and other commitments to accommodate their responsibilities in their Workshop project. A unique aspect of the experience is the fieldwork component. The extent of travel is determined by the needs of the project in discussions among the client, faculty advisor and student team. Travel usually takes place over Columbia’s winter break (in January) and/or spring break (in March). The number of students who travel from each team will be determined by the demands of the project, although budgetary considerations may also affect this decision. Faculty advisors do not travel with the teams. Teams are expected to take considerable initiative and responsibility and to work as relatively autonomous consulting teams.

Workshop Application Process

High demand among students plus the need to carefully match skills to specific projects means that entry to the Workshop must be by application. Priority is given to students taking the Methods for Development Practice course. We also reserve the right to refuse applications of students who do poorly in the Methods course or who have violated the SIPA Code of Academic and Professional Conduct. We expect ethical, culturally sensitive and professional behavior at all times from all Workshop participants.

Project Budgets

The Workshop requires substantial funds for travel. Core funds are generously provided by SIPA, other Columbia University schools and institutes, and many clients. However, these funds will not cover all of students’ travel expenses. We expect students to economize on their expenses to the extent possible without jeopardizing safety, which is a foremost priority. For example, we expect students to stay in modest accommodations and to use phone cards for communications. A course fee of $300 will be included in students’ spring tuition bill to help cover Workshop travel and other costs.

Students generally must pay for travel and other costs (credit cards are very helpful here) and then submit receipts for reimbursement. It is very important for students to follow SIPA guidelines in incurring and documenting these costs -- every year some students fail to follow these guidelines (e.g., having someone else buy an airline ticket for them). We are not responsible for students’ out-of-pocket costs if their reimbursement requests are rejected by Columbia’s Accounts Payable Department because of failure to abide by these guidelines.

Workshop Meeting Time

In the spring semester, all students participating in the Workshop must register for the Workshop in Development Practice course (U9001). The date and time for each team’s weekly meetings with their faculty advisor will be confirmed by the end of November. You cannot register for another class that meets at the same time as your Workshop section. There will be 13 class sessions during the semester, two of which will be joint sessions – sessions in which all of the teams will meet together (see Timeline below). During the other class sessions, teams will meet with their faculty advisors. Faculty advisors may work out alternative or additional times to meet as necessary. Although the Workshop does not follow the format of a regular lecture or seminar class, attendance is critically important.

1 http://bulletin.columbia.edu/sipa/academic-policies/
**Timeline for Fall 2014**

November 6  
Teams are announced. All teams need to do the following within the next 2-3 weeks:  
- Conduct initial team-building activities (including individual self-assessments and drafting of team guidelines)  
- Appoint a project manager, faculty advisor contact and client contact, budget officer and fundraising coordinator  
- Contact (and hopefully meet or talk with) their faculty advisor  
- Contact their client and introduce team members  
- Arrange a meeting and/or phone call with their client to discuss the preliminary terms of reference (PTOR) and any initial issues/questions related to the project workplan.

November 7  
Mandatory orientation session for all workshop participants (at 10 or 11:45 am in Room 407). There will be a make-up briefing on November 10 at 1 pm in Room 405.

November 14  
Security briefing in lab session (at 10 am and 11:45 am in Room 407).

November 17 & 18  
Budget meeting for all budget officers (at 1 pm – location TBC). **Each team must send their budget officer to discuss guidelines for budgets and reimbursement claims.**

November 21  
Team guidelines due by 5 pm (please email to Ilona Vinklerova [iv2105]).

November 24  
Fundraising committee meeting (at 1 pm – location TBC). **Each team must send their fundraising representative to discuss possible fundraising events.**

November 24  
Draft budgets are due by 5 pm (please email to Ilona Vinklerova [iv2105]).

December 1  
Draft workplans are due by noon (please submit hard copy to Room 1305 and post soft copy in the project file on Courseworks). These should also be shared for comment with your faculty advisor. **All workshop participants must participate in the workplan development process.**

December 3-5  
Workplan presentations and critiques (Dec. 3 – at 11 am and 4:10 pm in Room 413; Dec. 4 – at 2:10 pm in Room 410; Dec. 5 – at 10 am in Room 407). Presentation schedule to be announced later.

December 8  
Peer feedback on draft workplans due by 5 pm (please submit hard copy to Room 1305 and post soft copy in the project folder on Courseworks).

December 15  
Final workplans are due by 5 pm (please submit hard copy to Room 1305 and post soft copy in the project file on Courseworks). The final workplan should also be shared with faculty advisors and clients.

***As soon as possible, students planning to travel over the winter break should check their passport/US visa status, visa requirements in the destination country, and their health insurance coverage for international travel. We will provide more information on Columbia University medical coverage and travel assistance later in the fall. Traveling students must notify Jenny McGill (em419), their faculty advisor and teammates of their flight details, accommodation, and in-country itinerary if available.***
**Timeline for Spring 2015**

Week of January 20  
Teams meet with faculty advisors.

January 28  
“*Lessons from the field – what works and what doesn’t?*” at 4-6 pm in Room 1501 (joint session featuring a panel of students who traveled in January)

Week of February 2  
Teams meet with faculty advisors.

Week of February 9  
Teams meet with faculty advisors.

Week of February 16  
Teams meet with faculty advisors.

Week of February 23  
Teams meet with faculty advisors.

Week of March 2  
Teams meet with faculty advisors.

Week of March 9  
Teams meet with faculty advisors.

Week of March 16  
Spring break.

Week of March 23  
Teams meet with faculty advisors.

April 1  
“*From fieldwork to final reports and recommendations*” at 4-6 pm in Room 1501 (joint session involving team representatives and faculty advisors)

Week of April 6  
Teams meet with faculty advisors.

Week of April 13  
Teams meet with faculty advisors.

Week of April 20  
Teams meet with faculty advisors (trial runs of presentations).

April 30 - May 1  
**Final presentations in Room 1512** – Schedule of presentations will be available in advance so that teams can inform their clients and other interested parties.

May 8  
**Final reports due** to faculty advisors and the EPD Office (an electronic copy is sufficient).

**The Project Process**

1. **Initiating the Work: November-January**

   - The Workshop begins in November. Workplans and budgets need to be completed prior to the end of the first semester in consultation with clients and faculty advisors.
   - Teams traveling over winter break need to identify what they hope to accomplish during this first trip in collaboration with their faculty advisor and client.

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2 Each team’s weekly meeting day/time will be confirmed by the end of November.
• Before the end of the fall semester, teams should have begun background research for their projects, including an in-depth literature review and informational interviews. The exact nature of the literature review for each project will vary depending on the nature of the project, team travel plans and specific recommendations of the faculty advisor, but it is imperative that this process begins before the spring semester.

2. Preparing for and Completing Fieldwork: December-January and/or February-March

• Teams should consider the following in preparing for fieldwork:
  o Review your methodology carefully. Refer to the field research methods and tools you have studied in the “Methods for Development Practice” class. Seek out advice about methods that are unfamiliar to you.
  o Draft relevant field research instruments before traveling (e.g., interview and focus group guides, survey questionnaires, etc).
  o Pilot test these instruments and adjust as necessary.
  o Send field research instruments to the client for review upon request.
  o Have materials translated if necessary.
  o Develop an efficient and consistent method for recording data while in the field.

It is highly recommended that teams develop a fieldwork plan that summarizes what they intend to accomplish through travel, how they intend to do this, and a tentative itinerary.

• Teams should take full advantage of the resources available at SIPA (and Columbia University more generally). You should contact faculty members with special knowledge of the issues, sectors, countries or field research methods that are relevant to your project. Each team should contact the relevant global studies specialist in Lehman Library to help locate important research materials.

• The process of writing up interview and focus group discussion notes should be done as soon as possible after the event, along with initial analysis and adjustment of tools/lines of enquiry as necessary. As the fieldwork is being conducted, team members should clean and code the data they have collected, as appropriate.

• Those not traveling should have specific backstopping roles to perform in support of the team’s work and stay available by phone, email and/or fax. They will take information flowing back from the team and begin the analysis that will be incorporated into the emerging draft of the team’s report.

• Teams are strongly advised to complete a draft outline and at least some draft sections of their final report prior to spring break. This will obviously not incorporate findings from any fieldwork over spring break, but it will help guide the analysis of data that has been collected thus far and structure the final report.

3. Data Analysis, Negotiating Recommendations and Finalizing Reports: March - May

In addition to any other deliverables agreed upon with the client, all teams must complete a final report with an executive summary and recommendations. Teams must also present their findings and recommendations to SIPA faculty, fellow students and clients during a 2-day workshop in late April/early May.
Upon returning from the field, teams will analyze the cleaned/coded data gathered during their fieldwork. The analysis should identify major findings that will be the basis for the team’s final report and recommendations. Part of this process involves thinking about creative ways to present data in the final report and presentation.

Each team will prepare a draft final report including an executive summary and recommendations. The draft final report should be sent to the faculty advisor and then to the client for review (allowing sufficient time for them to provide comments). The team’s draft recommendations should be discussed with the client in advance to ensure that they are accepted by the client before submission of the final report.

Final reports are due on May 8. Note that some clients require translations of reports -- please include this in your budget and timeline. In addition to submitting a copy to your faculty advisor, please submit an electronic copy to the EPD Office on this date as well (or later, if you are still waiting for comments on your report from your client).

Final presentations are scheduled for April 30 and May 1. The schedule of presentations will be available well in advance so that teams can inform their clients as well as others who have some interest in the project.

4. Managing the Project Budget

Each team will also be responsible for developing and managing its project budget. Teams will be given an initial budget allocation in December. Each team must appoint a budget officer by early November who will be responsible for keeping the team budget up to date, attending budget meetings – there will be one in November and one in February – and briefing their own teams on reimbursement procedures. Budget officers will also work with the EPD Concentration Manager to ensure that team reimbursements are managed according to Columbia and SIPA procedures. Further information will be made available to budget officers at the first budget meeting.

5. Other Matters

Stay in close contact with your faculty advisor, keeping him/her aware of the directions your work is taking, changes in your workplan, shifts in schedules and adjustments in methodology. Each team will appoint a faculty advisor contact to facilitate communications. Talking with the faculty advisor at least once a week supplemented by emails is essential.

Managing your relationship with the client. Each team will appoint a client contact to facilitate this relationship. Cultivate your client just as if you were working for them as a compensated consultant. Learning to manage this relationship by thoughtful listening and careful use of communications is critical.

Be attuned to the client's constraints and expectations. Remember that most clients are not familiar with Columbia’s academic calendar, EPD culture, or your expectations for this project. They also have many other competing demands on their time. While learning from them is invaluable, you need to be constantly aware of their time limitations, their organizational culture and their bureaucratic imperatives. Reduce your expectations of them accordingly. At the same time, your interactions with the client should always be professional. For example, any documents sent to the client for review should be as complete as possible and of high quality.
• **Teamwork.** Teamwork is hard work that requires drawing on the diverse talents and interests of one another in order to achieve results beyond what any one team member could produce alone. Effective teamwork requires you to develop effective ways to manage both team dynamics and project-specific tasks. Working within a team for six months, while managing tight deadlines and client needs, is an opportunity to learn how to work effectively when you cannot be fully in control. Use this as an opportunity to learn more about your own management and communication styles, and to test different approaches to communication, group decision-making and problem-solving. Each team will start with some basic team-building activities (including self-assessments and development of team guidelines). This is just the beginning. Assigning and rotating team roles is strongly recommended. Holding effective team meetings (with an agenda, chair, time managed, and clear decisions about follow-up actions) will also be important. “Check in” regularly with your teammates to ensure that the group is functioning effectively, and revise your team guidelines as needed to address any new issues that may arise.

D. **Assessment**

Each faculty advisor will clarify the grading policy/process for their individual teams. Grading will be based on the quality of (1) individual contributions, (2) overall team performance, and (3) the team’s final report, final presentation and any other deliverables. Individual contributions will include (a) performance of specific assigned roles (e.g., as project manager, budget officer, client or faculty contact, etc), (b) individual written assignments (e.g., literature review, research tools or interview notes), and (c) contributions to team deliverables (e.g., sections of the workplan or final report). The faculty advisor will assign final grades to each team member, which will also incorporate the results of mid-term and final peer reviews.

Note that grades within groups will vary, depending on the faculty advisor’s assessment of individual contributions.

E. **Academic Integrity Statement**

SIPA does not tolerate cheating and/or plagiarism in any form. Those students who violate the Code of Academic & Professional Conduct will be subject to the Dean’s Disciplinary Procedures.³ Please familiarize yourself with the proper methods of citation and attribution. SIPA provides some useful resources online; we strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with these various styles before conducting your research.⁴ Violations of the Code of Academic & Professional Conduct should be reported to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

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³ [http://bulletin.columbia.edu/sipa/academic-policies/](http://bulletin.columbia.edu/sipa/academic-policies/)
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