

PRACTICUM
Cuba: Broadening Normalization
SIS-793-013-2016s

Wednesdays (5:30-8:00pm) - Spring 2016
Asbury 226

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Course Objectives

The SIS Practicum serves as one of the capstone options for SIS Masters students. It is designed to provide an important bridge between the academic setting and the professional world. You will work in teams on specific projects for one or more sponsoring clients. Over the course of these projects, you will build on the substantive and methodological knowledge you have acquired during the previous semesters of the SIS Masters Program. You will also have the opportunity to develop and enhance additional practical skills, such as oral and written communication and project management, in a professional context.

This Practicum gives students hands-on experience on a team focused on a specific foreign policy issue for interested, committed clients. Students meet with their clients, assess the clients' needs, and design and implement an efficient, effective strategy to research, analyze, assess policies, and develop policy recommendations in accordance with those needs. They examine the drivers of the U.S.-Cuba normalization process – the factors pushing the two countries toward a new relationship – and analyze how the policies and programs of the United States and Cuba could affect that process positively.

Performing as professionals, the Practicum team consults with U.S. government and nongovernmental experts on the relationship and, budgets and conditions permitting, travels to Cuba and elsewhere to answer these questions.

Stages

The first part of the Practicum will focus on 1) defining and researching the core issues within the substantive area and 2) on preparing for the first meeting with the client. During this initial stage, the class will meet with their teams once a week with the instructor to prepare for the initial client meeting. Once the team meets with its client, students will identify the scope of their project and break it down into manageable tasks that fully involve all team members. The team will meet with their instructor on a regular basis to review progress to date, to identify key issues and problems, and to seek guidance. Teams will continue to meet at least once a week to plan, coordinate, and carry out the project.

The semester will culminate with each team presenting their written products and giving an oral presentation to their client. Depending on arrangements with the client, all final reports and/or their executive summaries will be posted on the SIS Practica website (www.american.edu/sis/practica).

Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, you will have a better feel for how research, analysis, policy assessment and the development of policy options come together in a comprehensive process specifically designed to meet clients' current and future needs. You will learn, adapt, and implement an analytical model to suit this and other projects you will undertake. You will also become familiar with the different styles of writing, analyzing and presenting information in each context, and of presenting decision options – in a manner compatible with your clients' needs and institutional culture. In general terms, you will be better able to track policy debate in Washington and evaluate where you may fit in professionally in future endeavors.

Practica Director Support

Stephanie Fischer is available to students throughout the semester for assistance and coaching on general practicum issues and on consulting skills. Her contact information is:

fischer@american.edu
(703) 340-6030

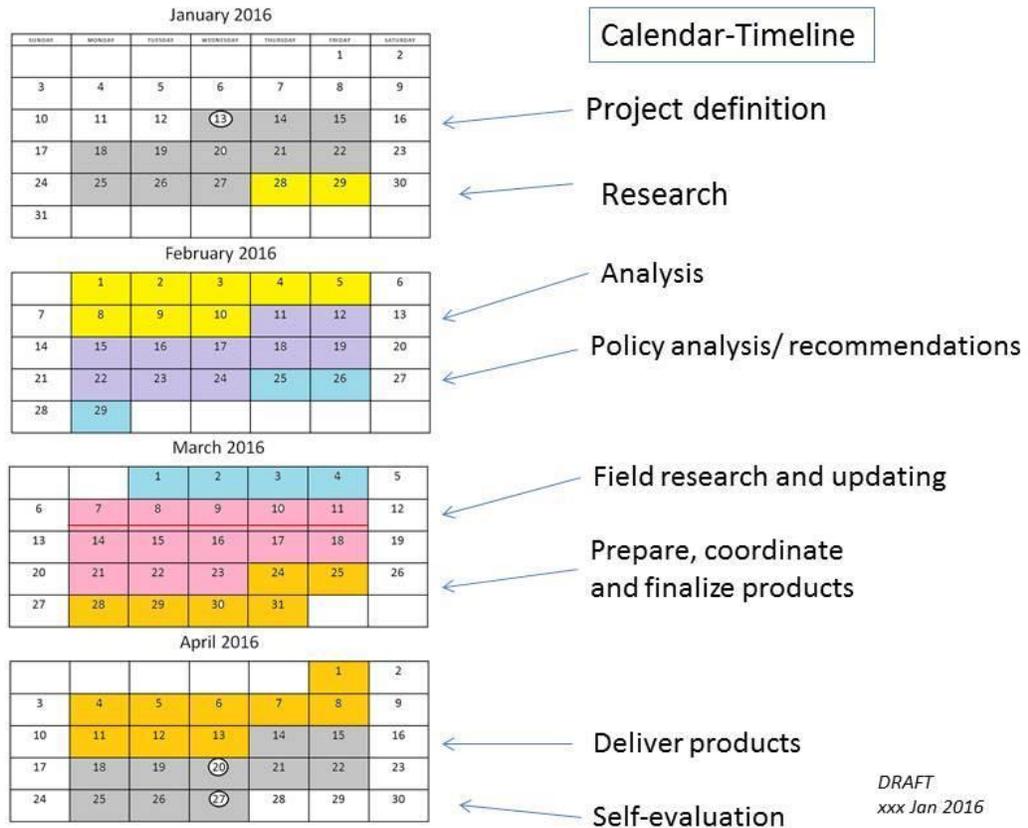
Office appointment at <https://stephaniefischer.youcanbook.me>, in SIS 249

Students are highly encouraged to view **practicum orientation videos** posted on blackboard (go to LIBWEB-999-026, click on Skills Module 1 in left hand column). Additionally, the following activities will take place during the semester.

- **Student Orientation:** Students can attend either the session on **Saturday, January 16, 1pm** or the session on **Thursday, January 21, 3:15-5:15 PM**. This orientation will provide an overview of expectations on the practicum including deliverable dates, the role of the professor, and some skills -- understanding the consulting relationship, managing your client and defining your scope of work.
- **Scope of Work (or Terms of Reference):** After approval by the client and professor, the statement of work is to be submitted to the Director of SIS Experiential Learning, Stephanie Fischer by **February 5th**. (While most of your SOWs will be completed before then, this is the final, drop dead date. And this does not mean that research only begins in February!)
- **Presentation Bootcamp: April 14, 15 and 16:** Two student teams sign up for each 1-hour block. While presentations do not have to be final by this point, there should be enough content to critique.
- **AU Presentations** of the team's final products and conclusions will be scheduled.
- **Final Client Presentations** will take place during the week of April 25th

Class Schedule, Readings, Deliverables

The schedule, reading assignments and deliverables for this Practicum are determined by the Team and, in this project, the “Country Teams” – based on the clients’ requirements. Here is the timeline the Team agreed to during the first and second classes:



Course Policy

In addition to being an important capstone project, the Practicum serves as a visible statement of the School of International Service and its graduate students to outside organizations. As such, it is important that students conduct themselves at the highest professional level. Students selected for Practicum courses are expected to fully participate in the program from the earliest stages to the final report. It is expected that Practicum students serve as responsible team members who are involved in project management, respectful of team deadlines, and conscientious of the larger needs of the team and the client. Students must also respect the client relationship and the terms set forth in the client agreement letters regarding client records, personnel, confidentiality or non-disclosure requirements. Students who do not conduct themselves in a professional manner will be removed from the Practicum and receive a failing grade for the course.

All sponsoring clients are informed that they have an open link to the instructor at any time during the semester to discuss any matters of relevance about the project and project team. The instructor, however, is not the leader of the project but rather a coach for the team to perform their work for the sponsoring client.

It is important to note that the team projects are to provide added value to the client organization(s). Student should not view the Practicum as an independent study or as an academic research paper. The project's focus should be on the client's problems, needs, aspirations and requirements. From the University's viewpoint, the Practicum should provide a first-rate learning experience for the student. From the client's viewpoint, the team should produce tangible, actionable results, and therefore any incremental learning by the student is a collateral benefit and not the primary objective. When these perspectives merge to the benefit of all the stakeholders in the project, students can claim success.

Grades

Your grade will depend on the following:

- The quality and quantity of your participation in class, Team, and Working Group discussions (20 percent)
- Your contributions to Google Docs (20 percent);
- The quality and sophistication of the summaries and analysis of your research, as presented with your Country Teams, class and the clients, and the policy recommendations you develop (25 percent) ;
- Your contributions to final products for the clients (25 percent); and
- Your reflections on “lessons learned” at end of project (10 percent).

If needed, the professor reserves the right to ask the Team to undertake a “peer assessment” exercise.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to abide by the Academic Integrity Code of American University (available online at <http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity.htm>).

Disability Support at American University

American University is committed to ensuring accessibility for all qualified students with disabilities to university programs and activities. In order to promote full participation on campus, one of two offices may be of assistance. The Academic Support Center (ASC) works with students with learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Disorder. Disability Support Services (DSS) works with students with physical and psychological disabilities.

Emergency Preparedness

In the event of a declared pandemic (influenza or other communicable disease), American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university

community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, you should refer to the AU website (<http://www.american.edu/emergency> or www.prepared.american.edu) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/ college-specific information.