

PRACTICUM
Venezuela: What's Next, and What to do?
SIS-793-001

Mondays (5:30-8:00pm) - Spring 2021
January 25 – April 26, 2021
on-line

Fulton Armstrong

Adjunct Professor
fultona@american.edu
(202) 885-6178 and (703) 864-9321

Office hours: *please e-mail to schedule*
Center for Latin American and Latino Studies
Spring Valley, Room 521

Course Objectives

This SIS Practicum serves as one of the Capstone options for SIS Master's 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 Master's 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 focuses on Venezuela – one of the most challenging issues for U.S. policy – and its implications for the region. It will assess the causes of the country's political and economic crises; analyze its current situation and likely scenarios for the future; and explore options that the United States has for contributing to solutions. The Practicum's principal client is the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), a leading research and advocacy organization committed to contributing to a better future for all in the Western Hemisphere.

This Practicum gives students hands-on experience on a team focused on a specific foreign policy issue for interested, committed clients, in the following stages:

- Students meet with the client, assess the client's needs, and design and implement an efficient, effective strategy to research, analyze, assess policies, and develop policy recommendations in accordance with those needs. The results are embodied in an agreed-upon Terms of Reference (TOR) document.
- They examine the drivers of the challenges in Venezuela – the factors causing or mitigating problems in the country and region – and analyze how the policies and programs of the United States and others could have positive or negative effects. Team members identify both challenges and opportunities for the client.

- Performing as professionals, the Practicum team conducts in-depth research and consults with U.S. government and nongovernmental experts. Each member produces a brief paper on an important aspect of the problem as identified in the TOR.
- Students develop, test, and write up recommendations for the client to consider in its advocacy and support for ways to overcome challenges and use opportunities.
- Students prepare a final written briefing book (a compendium of short analytical and policy option papers) and oral briefing on their findings and recommendations.
- The team provides a briefing on its conclusions for an interested AU audience and, subsequently, to the client organization. The client may also request or permit that the briefing be offered to others, based on mutual agreement with the team.

The team and sub-teams will meet during class time or agreed-upon alternatives each week. We will review progress, identify key issues and problems, and determine next steps.

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 your client’s 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 client’s needs and institutional culture. In general terms, you will be better able to track policy debate in Washington and other capitals, 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://fischer1.youcanbook.me>, in SIS 324

The Director will conduct the following activities during the semester.

- **Student Orientation:** Attendance is mandatory. You can attend either the session on January 28 at 4.30pm and January 31 at 5.30pm. (A Doodle poll will be sent out by the program.) This orientation will provide an overview of expectations of 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.
- **Presentation Practice:** Usually a week or so before your client briefing, you will participate in a Presentation Practice. Either the full team or sub-teams will sign up for a

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 at the end of the semester.
- **Final Client Presentations** will take place around May 1, depending on the client's availability.

Class Schedule, Readings, Deliverables

The schedule, reading assignments and deliverables for this Practicum are determined by the Team based on the client's requirements. The professor will propose a timetable for the Team to discuss and approve during the first and second meetings of the semester.

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.
- Practicum students will 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.
- Team members 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.

Special Measures for On-line Class

The content and exercises of this Institute work well on-line. Several practices will enhance their value and your enjoyment. (Please make SPECIAL NOTE of and consider printing out what to do if our platform or internet connections fail.)

- Your active participation in every phase of the project and every meeting is key.
- An environment of respect and trust is crucial for getting the full benefit from the discussions and exercises.
- Breakout rooms will be used for some analytic discussions and peer reviews.
- More breaks will be scheduled than in a normal classroom situation, and class will go off-line during certain exercises – while the professor remains on-line for any consultation you might seek.
- The group will be small enough that the “raise hand” icon should be visible to all, but the “chat” tool can be used as needed to keep discussion moving.
- The professor will happily schedule “office hours” to discuss any aspect of the class or your individual analytic projects.
- Difficulties can arise with Zoom or connectivity. Before class, please note (and consider printing out) the following guidances.
 - If it appears that the platform has crashed or all of us have been forced off, the professor will try to establish an e-mail conversation with everyone updating you on the situation.
 - If you think you have lost connectivity locally and you can’t jump right back on, please send an e-mail to the professor and/or a classmate a.s.a.p. to inform of the situation. If internet troubles continue, please use your cellphone to access class through one of the dial-in numbers provided in your Zoom invitation.
 - If the professor loses connectivity (and you have not), please stay online until the professor is back on or sends an e-mail updating you.
 - If the event of any outage, please stand by for 30 minutes. If not remedied by that time, class will be rescheduled.

Grading

Your grade will depend on the following:

- The quality and quantity of your participation in class, team, and sub-team discussions (20 percent)
- Your contributions to Canvas (20 percent) in the form of informational postings, written drafts, and quality comments on teammates’ drafts. Contributions should be substantive, constructive, and help move the team product forward.;

- The quality of the summaries and analysis of your research, as presented with sub-teams, class and the clients, and the policy recommendations you develop (25 percent). They should be fact-based and strengthened by additional research whenever possible;
- Your contributions to final products for the clients (25 percent), based on similar criteria; and
- Your reflections on “lessons learned” at end of project (10 percent), covering both substantive and process aspects.

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

Students with Disabilities

The following notice informs students with disabilities about appropriately requesting accommodations through the Academic Support and Access Center:

If you wish to receive accommodations for a disability, please notify me with a letter from the Academic Support and Access Center. As accommodations are not retroactive, timely notification at the beginning of the semester, if possible, is strongly recommended. To register with a disability or for questions about disability accommodations, contact the Academic Support and Access Center at 202-885-3360 or asac@american.edu, or drop by the ASAC in MGC 243.

Academic Support

The following notice informs students about academic support resources available through the Academic Support and Access Center:

All students may take advantage of the Academic Support and Access Center (ASAC) (MGC 243) for individual academic skills counseling, workshops, tutoring, peer tutor referrals, and supplemental instruction. Additional academic support resources available at AU include the Bender Library, the Department of Literature's Writing Center (located in the Library), the Math Lab in the Department of Mathematics & Statistics, and the Center for Language Exploration, Acquisition, & Research (CLEAR) in Asbury Hall. A more complete list of campus-wide resources is available in the ASAC.

Academic Integrity

The following notice informs students about the American University Academic Integrity Code and their rights and responsibilities under it:

All students are governed by American University's Academic Integrity Code. The Academic Integrity Code details specific violations of ethical conduct that relate to academic integrity. By registering, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and you are obliged to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the code. All of your work (whether oral or written) in this class is governed by the provisions of the Academic

Integrity Code. Academic violations include but are not limited to: plagiarism, inappropriate collaboration, dishonesty in examinations whether in class or take-home, dishonesty in papers, work done for one course and submitted to another, deliberate falsification of data, interference with other students' work, and copyright violations. The adjudication process and possible penalties are listed in American University's Academic Integrity Code booklet, which is also available on the American University website. Being a member of this academic community entitles each of us to a wide degree of freedom and the pursuit of scholarly interests; with that freedom, however, comes a responsibility to uphold the high ethical standards of scholarly conduct. Details about the Code can be found on the AU website (www.american.edu/academics/integrity).

Emergency Preparedness for Disruption of Classes

The following notice informs students about what happens as a result of an unexpected closure of the University due to weather or safety concerns, for example:

In the event of an emergency, 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. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies.

In the event of an emergency, students should refer to the AU Student Portal, the AU Web site (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.

Counseling Center

The following notice informs students about resources available through the Counseling Center:

The Counseling Center (x3500, MGC 214) offers intake and urgent care services, counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources.

Writing Center

The following notice informs students about resources available through the Writing Center:

The Writing Center (x2291, Bender Library, 1st floor) provides writing consultants to assist students with writing projects. Students must call to set up a free appointment. See www.american.edu/cas/writing/index.cfm

Center for Diversity and Inclusion

The following notice informs students about resources available through the Center for Diversity and Inclusion:

The Center for Diversity and Inclusion (x3651, MGC 201) is dedicated to enhancing LGBTQ, Multicultural, First Generation, and Women's experiences on campus and to "advance AU's commitment to respecting & valuing diversity by serving as a resource and liaison to students, staff, and faculty on issues of equity through education, outreach, and advocacy." See www.american.edu/ocl/cdi/index.cfm. OASIS:

Confidential Victim Advocacy

The following notice informs students about resources available through the Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence (OASIS):

A program of the Health Promotion and Advocacy Center (x3276, Hughes Hall 105), OASIS (the Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence) provides free and confidential victim advocacy services for American University students who are impacted by all forms of sexual violence (e.g. sexual assault, rape, dating or domestic violence, sexual harassment, or stalking)--either directly or indirectly. To schedule an advocacy meeting with one of AU's confidential victim advocates, visit their [You Can Book Me](http://auhpac.youcanbook.me) page at auhpac.youcanbook.me.