

Marxe Graduate Capstone Highlights

2024 - 2025



Dear Colleagues, Students, and Friends of the Marxe School,

It is my great pleasure to introduce the 2024-2025 Marxe Graduate Capstone Highlights, a celebration of the culminating work of our graduating master's students of public administration, international affairs, and higher education administration. These capstone projects represent the rigor, skill, and public service commitment that define graduate education at the Marxe School.

Each project featured here tackles real-world problems across government, nonprofit, and international contexts – from advancing equity in public service delivery to evaluating the impact of climate resilience policies. Collectively, they reflect the diversity of interests and impact of our students, as well as the strength of our curriculum in preparing them to lead with insight, evidence, and purpose.

Thank you to our faculty advisors, client partners, and staff who support students through this challenging and transformative process. And congratulations to the Marxe graduates whose work is now part of our growing legacy of public impact.

Warmly, Dean Sherry Ryan

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Master of Public Administration

Juned Abdullah

Under the direction of Professor Joselyn Muhleisen

Solutions for Foster Care in New York City

This capstone examines potential resources for foster care youth of New York City. Specifically, it focuses on programs that assist youth in their education, careers, and housing and have the potential to benefit them greatly.

Omolara Adelekan

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

Implications of the Trump-era Public Charge Rule on Medicaid Recipients in Queens

This capstone looks at how the Trump-era Public Charge Rule affected immigrant communities in Queens, New York, specifically their willingness to enroll in Medicaid. The rule, which labeled the use of benefits like Medicaid as a strike against immigration status, caused many to avoid healthcare out of fear. Drawing on public data from 2018 to 2023, the research shows a clear drop in enrollment after the rule took effect and a rise during COVID-19 when emergency aid expanded access. Even though the rule was reversed, fear still lingers. This project highlights the need for trust-building and inclusive health policies moving forward.

Carlos Martin Arenas and Nubia Graciano Herrera

Under the direction of Professor Nicole Gordon

Comparing Outcomes of Kinship vs. Non-Kinship: Foster Care in New York City

This capstone project examines and compares the outcomes of children placed in kinship and non-kinship foster care in New York City, specifically focusing on two key child welfare outcomes: placement stability and reunification rates. The study uses a mixed-methods design, combining analysis of administrative data, staff surveys, and qualitative interviews to generate a comprehensive understanding of how placement type influences children's experiences and long-term permanency. Based on these findings, the capstone recommends strengthening support for kinship caregivers, enhancing training and resources, and improving the licensure process.

Matthias Ayivor

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

The Prevalence and Impact of Visa Overstays, Unauthorized Immigration

Illegal migration has long challenged the United States, with visa overstays now surpassing border crossings as the primary source. In 2022, the Department of Homeland Security reported over 700,000 possible visa overstays. This is driven by flawed entry-exit systems, economic opportunities, and family reunification. Despite enhanced border security and biometric monitoring, enforcement remains inconsistent. Overstayers often work in low-skilled sectors like agriculture and construction, contributing economically but also facing exploitation and depressing wages. To curtail these evolving challenges, more robust monitoring and targeted policy reforms are needed.

Mary Badawy, Leah Book, and Kathleen Irwin

Under the direction of Professor Jason Spicer

Affordable Childcare to Support New York City Families and Maternal Workforce Participation: A Policy Options Analysis

This policy options analysis addresses the high cost of childcare in New York City and its impact on maternal workforce participation. We evaluate three options to improve existing interventions: 1) raising income eligibility for direct upfront childcare payments and gradually phasing out benefits; 2) creating a new tax credit for moderate-income working families of children under three years old; 3) scaling up an existing employer partnerships pilot program. We score each option on relative cost, administrative capacity, political feasibility, equity, and impact on mothers. We determine that the new tax credit is the strongest option and conclude with recommendations for implementation.

Surajo Bello

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

China's Digital Silk Road: Cyber Warfare as the Face of Digital Colonialism—and How to Fight Back

China's Digital Silk Road (DSR) has increased Africa's digital dependency, exploiting data and infrastructure for control. Tactics like cyber espionage, surveillance tools, and disinformation have undermined sovereignty, as seen in Ethiopia. To counter this, the study recommends stronger data governance, cybersecurity reforms, and the creation of a continental cybersecurity task force to safeguard Africa's digital sovereignty.

Ali Blumberg, Jennifer Worksman, Amber Garcia, and Jacob Zucker

Under the direction of Professor Jason Spicer

Reimagining Public Education: Drawing Lessons from Finland's Educational Success

This capstone compares Finland's high-performing education system with New York State's, highlighting differences in teacher training, funding, curriculum, and testing. Despite higher U.S. spending, Finland ranks higher due to its cohesive, student-centered model. New York reflects many national challenges, including inequitable funding and overreliance on testing. The study recommends adopting Finnish-inspired reforms: stronger teacher preparation, needs-based funding, less standardized testing, and expanded student support, aiming to improve equity and outcomes in New York's schools.

Katie Borrazzo

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

Reforming Animal Welfare in Factory Farms through the Industrial Agriculture Accountability Act

This capstone discusses the animal welfare impacts of meat production and policy recommendations for its improvement. It centers on an examination of the Industrial Agriculture Accountability Act of 2023, which would reform some of the most egregious factory farming practices involving the transport and slaughter of livestock, as well as suggesting additional provisions which would strengthen the Act. Through a literature review and interviews with policy and legal experts, this paper explores the political strategy, cost estimates, and a set of common counterarguments regarding the viability of reforming farmed animal welfare.

Iurii Bystro

Under the direction of Professor Carla Robbins

Integrating Ukraine's Defense Industry into Western Supply Chains for Deterrence

This capstone examines how Ukraine's defense industry can protect the country long-term, even after the war. It argues that Ukraine must transform its defense industrial base (DIB) into a competitive, market-driven sector integrated with Western supply chains to ensure rapid, reliable production. The paper assesses current barriers, highlights successes like drone and Bohdana howitzer production, and examines failures tied to the state-run conglomerate Ukroboronprom. Drawing on Czech and Turkish models, it offers steps to modernize Ukraine's DIB and support private firms—making Ukraine a strong contributor to European defense and strategic deterrence.

Martha Vargas Calderon

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

Psychological Abuse in the Workplace: The Importance of Workplace Leadership and DEI

My capstone thesis examined the intersection between psychological abuse in the workplace, leadership, and DEI to address its negative effects on U.S. BIPOC workers. The most prevalent form of this type of abuse is the one that leadership inflicts on lower rank employees. In a capitalist society like the U.S., current managerial prescriptions fail and BIPOC workers are still relegated to non-leadership positions. The failure of current legal protections is achieved by design and the recommendations include legislation of stronger and bolder worker protections through the Workplace Psychological Safety Act to challenge status quo and protect U.S. BIPOC workers.

Lindsey Cariello

Under the direction of Professor Neil Sullivan

Guided Beginnings: A Proposal for Increased Access to Doula Care in Nassau County, New York

With an infant death rate higher than New York City, stark racial and socioeconomic disparities in maternal morbidity and birth outcomes by zip code, and a high proportion of non-English speaking families, Nassau County birthing people are in dire need of equitable access to an important part of the equation in solving for these problems: empathetic, holistic, and compassionate care by certified doulas. This paper proposes the creation of a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization headquartered in Hempstead, New York to provide free or low-cost doula matching services, per-diem childcare, and space for doula-client meetings to low-income birthing people in Nassau County.

Rebecca Chasan

Under the direction of Professor Neil Sullivan

A State Legislative Proposal to Grant DOI Access to Juvenile-Related Records Maintained by ACS

I propose an amendment to the Social Services Law to remove restrictions on DOI's access to State-maintained child abuse and maltreatment records, including ones associated with unfounded determinations, and records related to juveniles in detention. The law should be amended to remove the requirement that OCFS pre-approve DOI's access to child abuse and maltreatment records; to allow DOI access to reports concluding that allegations of child abuse and maltreatment are unfounded, for investigating allegations that ACS has improperly handled claims of potential abuse, or to investigate false reporting; and to allow DOI access to records related to juveniles in detention in NYC facilities.

**Priscilla Chery, Jake Iaccino,
Debbie Esther Louis, Ling Ren, and Milcah Slater**

Under the direction of Professor Jason Spicer

**Can NYC Transit Implement Sustainable Strategies to Approach
Homelessness and Address Public Safety?**

This capstone project explores the issue of homelessness within New York City's public transit system, focusing on the challenges faced by transit agencies and the impact on public safety. The research emphasizes the need for a coordinated, humane, and data-informed approach to address homelessness while ensuring the safety of both unhoused individuals and transit riders. Interviews with key stakeholders, including representatives from the MTA, BRC, DHS, NYPD, and outreach organizations reveal that while interagency collaboration is essential, it remains inconsistent. Programs like SCOUT and PATH have shown promise, but the lack of formal coordination and limited resources.

Alexander Margulies Cohen

Under the direction of Professor Neil Sullivan

Designing a Public Basketball League For New York City Community Boards

Creating a publicly funded basketball league for NYC community boards would both improve community engagement with local politics and issues and revitalize a cornerstone of New York's culture for a new generation. Getting people outside and interacting with each other can have an effect on their neighborhood that can influence the way citizens think about government programs and city projects far beyond supporting their local team. Arts and leisure, and athletic events are all integral parts of urban life that must be supported in a visible way.

Nicole Cox

Under the direction of Professor Neil Sullivan

**Eco-Sustainability in New York City:
Improving Waste Management Through Greater Sector Collaboration**

The current global climate crisis is driven by overconsumption, insufficient waste management infrastructure, and fragmented sector collaboration. These deficiencies result in microplastic pollution and toxic landfill emissions. New York City (NYC) can demonstrate its leadership in combating climate change through sector collaboration and consistent investment towards advancing plastic and organic waste management. Key improvements will include strengthening New York State extended producer responsibility (EPR) legislation, expanding waste infrastructure through public-private sector collaboration, and investing in education through advertising and publicly available education resources.

Daisy Flores-Torres

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

Better Contracting for Nonprofits: The Urgent Need to Reform New York State's Broken System

This thesis explores how NY State's chronic noncompliance with the Prompt Contracting Law negatively affects nonprofit organizations, despite the state's reliance on them to deliver public services. Drawing on interviews, policy analysis, and a literature review, the research highlights how delayed contract payments compromise the stability of nonprofits and their capacity to meet community needs. This thesis concludes with policy recommendations inspired from New York City's "Better Contract for New York", considering the veto of S4877-A/A2740-B, aimed at contracting reform. The findings emphasize the urgent need for reform in the state's approach to contracting with its nonprofit partners.

Chinue Foreman

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

New York City's Four Borough Jail Plan: Will Direct Supervision Improve NYC's History of Incarceration

After decades of mismanagement and derelict conditions for inmates and staff at Rikers, New York City plans to build four borough jails modeled after direct supervision jail design theory and management principles to replace the jail system. However, will direct supervision jails be enough to combat systemic management issues that are endemic to New York City's history of incarceration? This capstone analyzes three direct supervision jails to evaluate their effectiveness in mitigating mismanagement and previous institutional failings.

Marco Francois

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

Mental Healthcare Services for Spanish Speakers in New York City: How Accessible Are They Really?

This capstone analyzes the accessibility of mental healthcare for Spanish speakers in New York City. Despite the city's linguistic diversity and legal mandates of language access, Spanish speakers face significant barriers to mental healthcare. This includes: a lack of bilingual providers, cultural stigma, and systemic inequalities. The findings indicate pressing gaps between policy and practice. For instance, it is stressed out that there is a need for language-specific, culturally competent services and more targeted outreach to meet this population's mental health needs.

Emarinsie Funderburke

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

Sistas, We Hear You: The Impact of Doulas on Black Maternal Health Outcomes

In the United States Black women experience disproportional maternal health outcomes compared to white women. According to the CDC Black mothers are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy related causes. The maternal rate for Black women in 2023, 50.3 deaths per 100,000 live births, compared to 14.5 per 100,000 for white women. Research shows Black women with doula care had 57.5% lower odds of postpartum depression and anxiety, 22% lower risk of preterm birth and 78% reduction in cesarean rate. Doula care has been shown to be a cost-effective intervention in improving maternal health outcomes.

Irma Goldberg

Under the direction of Professor Jason Spicer

Lessons from Abroad:

How the U.S. Can Learn from Countries Tackling the Loneliness Epidemic

The U.S. is facing a growing loneliness epidemic, yet national efforts to combat it remain fragmented. This Capstone analyzes successful anti-loneliness strategies from the United Kingdom, Denmark, and the Netherlands—ranging from social prescribing and public health integration to community-based, local initiatives. Drawing on these models, it offers recommendations for U.S. policymakers to design people-centered spaces, fund data-driven interventions, and implement local pilots—laying the groundwork for the National Strategy to Advance Social Connection.

Jordan Handler

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

Prepare for the Next Disease X:

A COVID-19 Resource Allocation Study on Westchester County DES

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed significant challenges in allocating necessary medical resources beyond vaccines. Local governments struggled with not only a lack of preparedness, but also a lack of supply and increased demand. To better prepare for the next pandemic that may come, several new schools of thought about allocating medical resources have formed. This capstone considers these schools and compares them against the actions of Westchester County Department of Emergency Services during the pandemic.

Yamin Inzali

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

Analysis of ACS Supportive Housing Program for Aged-Out Foster Youth in NYC

This capstone explores the housing challenges faced by aged-out foster youth in New York City and evaluates the effectiveness of the ACS Supportive Housing Program. Drawing on policy analysis, interviews, and program data, this study reveals systemic gaps, including long waitlists, insufficient vouchers, and inadequate support services. It highlights innovative solutions such as AnthosHome and Fair Futures, and recommends expanding dedicated housing, streamlining referrals, and involving youth in program design. Strengthening supportive housing infrastructure is essential to preventing homelessness and ensuring long-term stability for youth transitioning out of foster care.

Aura Jimenez

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

How Effective Fees and Fines Reform Can Help Low-Income Communities: The End Predatory Court Fees Act

This capstone explores fees and fines reform in New York State, focusing on how such reform can ease the burden on low-income communities. It highlights San Francisco's pioneering work as a model and evaluates the early efforts of NYC's Internal Fees and Fines Workgroup. The study aims to support the End Predatory Court Fees Act, which would eliminate mandatory court fees, probation charges, and income-blind fines, helping prevent incarceration for nonpayment and restoring judicial discretion.

Zoë Johnson, Mahdieh Soleimani, Eralda Tola, and Gloria Tsolenyanu

Under the direction of Professor Jason Spicer

Bridging the Coverage Gap: Comparing Municipal Healthcare Initiatives in NYC, SF, and DC as Pathways to 100% Coverage

With over 9% of Americans uninsured in 2023, cities like New York, San Francisco, and DC have implemented innovative municipal healthcare programs—NYC Care, Healthy SF, and DC Healthcare Alliance—for residents ineligible for traditional insurance. We conduct a comparative policy analysis of these three municipal programs, evaluating their effectiveness across five dimensions. Our analysis culminates in a scorecard rubric. Our findings will provide policymakers with a framework for implementing similar programs, potentially improving health equity, reducing pressure on public systems, and establishing city-driven approaches to lowering uninsured rates.

Vanita Kontrakul

Under the direction of Professor Neil Sullivan

Cat Cafes as a Support System to Address the Homeless Cat Crisis in New York City

My capstone focuses on establishing cat cafes as a support system for local cat rescues and shelters in getting more cats adopted and making more space to take in more homeless cats for foster care and more adoptions. These cat cafes would house a certain number of cats at a time for adoptions and provide the space for both cats and the prospective adoptees to interact after paying an entry fee. In those spaces, the cats have the freedom to roam and play and are not cooped up in cages all day. At the same time, part of the sales the cat cafes make from selling drinks, snacks, and the entry fees would go to the funds for sustaining the resources for the local cat rescue and shelter work.

Ronald Lashley

Under the direction of Professor Joselyn Muhleisen

Financial Constraints Limit Black Youth Participation in Baseball

Black youth have limited access to the sport of baseball due to household financial constraints resulting in minimal participation in the sport at all levels. Without action, the sport of baseball will become an exclusive club for those with the financial means. Black youth will have limited dreams as they will not have access to seeing the various opportunities the sport can bring to them. The sport of baseball is growing more internationally and will only continue to grow if its audience sees that there is true access to the sport regardless of economic, social, or political status. Without proper representation black youth will not see that they can have access to these opportunities.

Valentina Loaiza

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

Language Barriers in Social Services: Implementing HUD’s Language Access Policies in Peekskill’s Section 8 Program

The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program is the federal government’s primary program for assisting low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to afford housing in the private market. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, recipients of federal funds are required to provide meaningful access to people with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). This research explores how the Peekskill Section 8 office is currently serving and planning to serve the needs of the LEP community. Findings suggest that the Section 8 program is not taking sufficient action to reduce communication barriers with the LEP community and relies on community non-profit organizations to meet these needs.

Eliza Loehr

Under the direction of Professor Neil Sullivan

Why Am I Learning This? Integration of Work-Based Learning as a Path to High School Graduation

New York State is overhauling its graduation requirements, a pivotal shift allowing internships to count towards graduation. This presents a significant chance to link classroom learning with real-world application. However, it’s a high-stakes endeavor; if poorly implemented, it could worsen educational inequities. With many NYC students graduating unprepared for living-wage careers despite high graduation rates, integrating career-connected learning, like internships, is vital to boost engagement and career readiness. This paper champions using these new state requirements to reshape education and ensure all students are set up for future success.

Caleah K. McMillan

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

A Charter for Stability: Reforming New York City’s Revenue Stabilization Fund Guidance

This capstone examines the need to amend the New York City Charter verbiage surrounding its Revenue Stabilization Fund (RSF), as it currently lacks clear policy guidance on deposits, withdrawals, and target size. The paper evaluates current state and local RSF best practices, adding recommendations that include: defining “temporary emergency,” removing withdrawal limits, and requiring legislative votes for withdrawals outside of standard conditions, all of which bolster fiscal transparency and resilience against mismanagement. The analysis underscores the importance of clearer RSF guidance and calls for action from New York City Council to enhance the city’s long-term financial stability.

David Minsky

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

An Assessment of Medicaid Managed Care

This study looks into whether the for-profit model for Medicaid managed care has an impact on our care processes, and proposes that Medicaid partner solely with non-profit managed care organizations. Using report cards issued by the National Committee of Quality Assurance, the study found that overall, accredited non-profit Medicaid managed care plans have superior health care processes than accredited for-profits. While there was no significant difference between non-profits and for-profits among Republican states, non-profits scored higher than for-profits in Democratic states and states with no Medicaid expansion. There was no evidence that for-profits perform better than non-profits.

Clara Monk

Under the direction of Professor Jason Spicer

Community Engagement Goals at Reading Partners: A Sessions-Based and Effort-Aligned Redesign

Reading Partners is a national literacy nonprofit that mobilizes community volunteers to provide twice weekly one-on-one tutoring to elementary school students in public schools. To assess and measure regional community engagement, Reading Partners has focused on a total tutor goal, which has perverse incentives, fails to reward valuable efforts, and does not set regions up for success in meeting their student goals. In this study, I conduct interviews with stakeholders across regional and national teams to create two key recommendations on how goals could be better set and tracked such that teams are properly incentivized to perform in ways that directly contribute to serving students.

Andrew Newman

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

Addressing the Lifeguard Shortage at New York City Public Outdoor Pools and Beaches

NYC has experienced a deficit of lifeguards, risking the safety of swimmers and restricting access to public outdoor pools and beaches. A survey of peer-reviewed research, historic lifeguarding, feedback and data from government agencies and lifeguarding professionals, media coverage, and swimming records yield promising interventions in lifeguard requirements, swimming capacity, compensation, and surveillance technology. Effective interventions include lessening requirements for pool lifeguarding, increasing the number and diversifying the locations of testing and training sites, and considerations of improving lifeguard vigilance through drowning detection systems and drone technology.

Katia Nicolas, Berenice Navarrete Perez, Jennifer Pyne, and Jovanna Sealey

Under the direction of Professor Jason Spicer

Tackling Child Care Enrollment Barriers for Undocumented and Mixed-Status Immigrant Families in New York

Access to affordable childcare is a critical issue for undocumented and mixed-status immigrant families in New York. There exist several barriers such as exclusion from childcare voucher programs due to their documentation status despite some families being eligible for Early Childhood Education programs. To better understand the challenges of child care enrollment in New York, we interviewed various stakeholders. Selected through convenience sampling based on availability and willingness to participate, the study revealed the following as barriers: language barriers, income verification, confidentiality concerns, eligibility confusion and fear/lack of awareness. We provided 6 recommendations: Amend Local Law 30 of 2017, Pass New York State Senate Bill 2023-S4522, Create comprehensive Staff Training Programs, Organizational Policies, and Standardized Protocols when handling ICE-related situations, Allocate Funding to expand Outreach Efforts (Public Campaign), Create a Unilateral Channel of Communications Amongst Partnered Organizations and Pass Universal Child Care Senate Bill S3245.

Candybet (Candy) Pina

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

Bridging the Gap: A Survey of NAACP Perceptions and the Road Forward

This research looks at how the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) can better connect with younger generations and stay relevant in today's fast-changing social justice landscape. It explores how people view the organization today compared to its civil rights-era legacy. Through original survey data and comparisons with similar movements, it's clear that many younger activists are drawn to decentralized models of advocacy. 76.7% of respondents said modernizing is key to the NAACP's future. The findings suggest that to promote engagement, the NAACP could benefit from pilot programs supporting regional autonomy, grassroots fundraising, and digital outreach.

Tatsiana Puzevich

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

Symbolic Composting?: How DSNY's Bureaucratic Culture Shapes NYC's Organics Program

This study investigates how the bureaucratic culture of the NYC Department of Sanitation (DSNY) affects the implementation of the city's organics program. Drawing on policy documents, public hearings, conference observations, and using discourse, framing, and lexical analyses, the research highlights conflicting internal cultures, symbolic compliance, and jurisdictional control that limits collaboration with community composting groups. It argues that DSNY's internal structure and institutional norms shape not only which policies are implemented but also how they operate on the ground—contributing to a gap between program goals and real-world outcomes.

Alexandre Ritscher

Under the direction of Professor Joselyn Muhleisen

New York City's Housing Crisis: Three Zoning Policy Strategies to Build More Housing

The discrepancy between the increasing rate of demand for housing along with a limited supply in New York City has created a citywide vacancy rate of 1.4 percent. Put simply, New York City needs to build more housing. However, regulatory obstacles such as outdated zoning practices established generations ago have impeded on the city's ability to facilitate the creation of more housing. Throughout this paper, three potential solutions are explored to solve this regulatory issue and combat the growing housing shortage of New York City.

Cameron K. Robello

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

Civic Stewardship and New York City's Urban Forest Plan

This project conducts original research to inform civic stewardship policy for New York City's first comprehensive Urban Forest Plan and support a more equitable forest in the long-term.

Mir Silvy

Under the direction of Professor Nicole Gordon

Safeguarding Taxpayers' Money: The Value of Transparency of NYC Procurement System

This project proposes reforms that would strengthen transparency, efficiency, and public trust in New York City's procurement practices. However, after some comparative analysis of procurement systems in Washington, DC, Los Angeles, and Chicago; it appears that these cities would not serve as models for improving NYC. On the contrary, the research shows that NYC operates with one of the most advanced, transparent, and structurally sound procurement systems among the major U.S. cities. This paper analyzes the use of systems PASSPort (Procurement and Sourcing Solutions Portal), focusing on concerns around data accessibility, vendor payment delays, and ongoing corruption and fraud.

Nathalie Taveras

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

Bridging Gaps: Advocating for Legislative Changes in Special Education for NYC Charter Schools

Charter schools have come under scrutiny for failing to support students with disabilities. Networks like Success Academy, Achievement First, and Zeta Charter Schools have faced legal action for discriminatory practices. This thesis examines Section 2853(4) of the New York State Charter Schools Act and related policies. Using qualitative interviews, legal case analyses, and charter renewal reports, it explores claims and literature to identify systemic gaps. Findings reveal how limited oversight and internal practices contribute to inequities, offering recommendations for policymakers and charter leaders.

Manuel Tejada

Under the direction of Professor Joselyn Muhleisen

Former Foster Care Youth: An Invisible Group in Need of Support

This project details a regulatory problem related to transition age and former foster youth (FFY), primarily focusing on FFY, youth who have aged out of care to themselves after the legal age of discharge (18-21). The regulatory problem is the lack of federal comprehensive resources and services for FFY and associated negative outcomes seen in educational attainment and advancement, employment, housing, etc. FFY face significant headwinds related to advancing their education and careers, face greater housing instability, and higher chances of interacting with the criminal justice system.

Denise Thomas

Under the direction of Professor Nicole Gordon

Disciplinary Actions for Wrongful Conviction in New York: An Analysis of Prosecutorial Misconduct

How does a system that is supposed to be built on honesty and fairness rectify the unjust behaviors involved in various wrongful convictions. This capstone's goal is to shed light on the lack of deterrence and constraints for the misdeeds of prosecutorial misconduct. This analysis will provide insight on the course of action or lack thereof for reprimands that are in place but not enforced when evidence illustrates the egregious acts of prosecutors that result in the incarcerations of innocent individuals.

Jessica Wagman

Under the direction of Professor Neil Sullivan

Pilot Program to Bridge the Gap Between NYC Government and Local Animal Rescue Nonprofits

My pilot program will create a new partnership between Staten Island animal rescues and the Mayor's Office of Animal Welfare, to help end animal homelessness. This project will consist of local animal rescues joining forces to end euthanizing in NYC, offer an alternative solution for the animal overpopulation crisis and improve NYC's current animal welfare system. Every day there are countless numbers of abandoned and homeless animals in NYC. These animals are currently being brought to a kill shelter known as Animal Care Centers. Local animal rescues are removing these animals from the ACC before they are killed. The ACC has taken over all five boroughs and this system must change.

Shenae Walker

Under the direction of Professor Neil Sullivan

Unsafe Living Conditions in Low-Income Housing: Implementing a Tenant Advocacy Program in NYC

This capstone addresses the unsafe living conditions faced by low-income tenants in New York City by proposing a Tenant Advocacy Program. The program will support residents through individual assistance, education, simple technology, and partnerships with key organizations. It will offer direct support, build tenant capacity, and improve how problems are resolved. The program will work to close the gap between legal protection and lived realities. By working directly with communities, it will help vulnerable residents secure safe, healthy homes while strengthening tenant voices and driving lasting change.

Jacob van Winkle

Under the direction of Professor Jason Spicer

Testing Climate Messaging in TikTok-Style Videos

TikTok and Instagram videos are powerful tools for communication. My project used a randomized experiment in which participants watched one of four TikTok-style videos—all unrelated to climate change—but each varied in how climate content was included, ranging from explicit messaging to subtle integration. Findings show that subtly weaving climate messages into a story can boost viewer attentiveness and feel more natural than direct statements or calls to action. The research offers a strategy for creators and organizations to integrate climate messaging into popular formats like TikTok while keeping audiences engaged.

Veronika Worosz

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

Cutting Cure: The Economic Consequences of Defunding the NIH

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is a cornerstone of U.S. medical innovation, economic growth, and public health. Its \$47 billion annual budget supports over 400,000 jobs, drives \$90+ billion in economic activity, and underpins nearly all new medical treatments. Cuts to NIH funding would result in job losses, stalled research, higher healthcare costs, and weakened U.S. global leadership in science. Despite its vital role, NIH remains politically vulnerable due to discretionary budgeting, limited lobbying power. Long-term investment in NIH yields lifesaving breakthroughs and economic returns that far outweigh any short-term budget savings.

Executive Master of Public Administration

In progress for completion in June 2025, under the direction of
Professors Nicole Gordon and Michael Stoller

Jonathan Alvarez, Jonathan Arias, and Melissa Cato

Community-based Programming and Juvenile Justice

Juan Cabrera, Satoshi Oya, and Metin Sarci

Unlocking Nonprofit and Private Investment for Affordable Housing

Olivia Jimenez and Rosemary Polanco

Eating Disorders and Poverty

Master of International Affairs

Nicolo Antonucci

Under the direction of Professor Carla Robbins

Carbon Taxing in British Columbia: Understanding the Life and Death of a Policy

This capstone is a case study analysis of carbon taxing policy in British Columbia by understanding the lifespan of the often-contentious policy in the Canadian province and the conditions that allowed it to overcome repeated bouts of public opposition. The policy's ability to deliver intended results was an important factor in it generating support, however, its repeal in April 2025 shows us how although well liked and successful, carbon taxing remains a precarious climate policy. The lessons learned from BC can be applied in other jurisdictions looking to implement market-based solutions to climate change.

Jaime García-Ricote

Under the direction of Professor Carla Robbins

Bridging the Lunar Divide: Analyzing the Case for U.S.-Russia Space Cooperation in the Artemis Era

The modern space race has created a fragmented international landscape, with NASA's Artemis program and the China-Russia ILRS emerging as rival efforts to return humans to the Moon. As the International Space Station nears decommissioning, this capstone explores whether past U.S.-Russia collaboration on the ISS offers a model for future cooperation under Artemis. It analyzes the strategic and political dimensions, as well as some scientific and technical areas, of that partnership using official records, academic studies, and expert insights. While the current geopolitical situation makes full collaboration unlikely, limited cooperation may still be possible in areas of mutual benefit.

Andrew Ghosh

Under the direction of Professor Carla Robbins

The Political Salience of Immigration Rhetoric in Canada's 2021 Federal Elections

This capstone examines the impact of anti-immigrant rhetoric on Canadian politics, and specifically on the success of candidates running in the 2021 federal elections. It applies qualitative coding practices to examine voter responses to rhetoric, while adjusting for electoral districts with varying proportions of local immigrant population.

Pavel Kutsevol

Under the direction of Professor Carla Robbins

Assessing the Impact of the UNOCT on the UN's Counter Terrorism Mission

This capstone aims to assess the impact of the United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism (UNOCT) on the United Nations' counter terrorism efforts. The office was established in 2017 as a result of a major reform initiated by Secretary General António Guterres and was tasked with enhancing coherence of UN's counter terrorism mission, improving resource mobilization, strengthening leadership, and improving capacity-building assistance to member states in their fight against terrorism. My capstone research is based on interviews with experts and a review of external and UN reports to answer the question: does the UNOCT effectively help member states combat terrorism?

Benjamin P.C. Morales

Under the direction of Professor Thomas Main

Counter Terrorism in Colombia: Using Colombia as a Catalyst for Global Counter Terrorism Reform

Colombian anti-terrorism strategy has been successful due to the fact that Colombia is still a functioning state after sixty years of armed conflict against narco and political terrorist groups. Other nations should look to Colombia for their own anti-terrorism strategy as Colombia is currently much safer than it has been in decades. After conducting interviews with men directly involved in the conflict, the evidence suggests that human rights violations did occur, but by lone wolf actors. Conclusion: Colombian counter terrorism policy is portable to an extent. Violent policy can be replicated in almost all situations, but non-violent policy is only suitable for specific forms of terrorism.

Eva-Tshama Mulaja

Under the direction of Professor Rob Smith

The Constant Struggles of Unaccompanied Minor Migrants and Their Allies in France: Between Legal Struggles, Political/Public Opinion Challenges, and the Humanitarian Response

Unaccompanied minor migrants (UMMs) are among the most vulnerable yet underrepresented groups in migration discourse. At the intersection of children's rights and immigration control, UMMs navigate systems marked by bureaucratic complexity, limited social inclusion, and a growing political focus on migration. This paper explores the legal, institutional, and societal frameworks shaping their experiences in France, considers the intersection of international, regional, and national migration policies, and delves into challenges faced by organizations assisting them. It concludes with recommendations to enhance protection and integration outcomes for UMMs and improve host country responses.

Olugbenga A. Opesanwo

Under the direction of Professor Zach Mampilly

No Bandwidth: New York City Single Adult Shelter Policy and Single Adults

No Bandwidth: New York City Single Adult Shelter Policy and Single Adults assesses the city's ability to assist single adults quickly transition into permanent housing. The study assumes that the DHS is overwhelmed by the city's ever-increasing homeless problem and asks, do single adults experience an extended stay in the NYC shelter system? This study analyzes publicly available DHS policy documents and data and found that single adults experience extended LOS, spending a minimum of one year and four months and recommends the decentralization of single adult intake centers, breaking them into categories that identify with single adults' current somatic and psychological condition.

Jasmine Perdomo

Under the direction of Professor Rob Smith

Haiti's Migration Crisis Stems from Political, Economic, and Climate Issues Needing Regional Action

Haiti's migration crisis stems from political instability, economic hardship, and climate disasters. Using the Push-Pull Theory, this capstone analyzes key push factors and urges a regional response. It highlights strained ties with neighbors like the Dominican Republic and advocates for a regional framework focused on border cooperation, economic investment, climate resilience, and political reform. The study concludes that without addressing root causes, outmigration will persist. Regional collaboration is essential to stabilize Haiti and ease pressures on surrounding nations, promoting long-term security and shared responsibility across the Caribbean.

Hannah Presser

Under the direction of Professor Zach Mampilly

Measuring Self-Sufficiency: Challenges and Solutions in U.S. Refugee Resettlement

This research examines self-sufficiency among recently arrived refugees in the U.S. While the federal government expects refugees to reach self-sufficiency within 90 days, it does not provide a clear measure. As a result, under-resourced resettlement agencies must interpret and meet these expectations on their own, often compromising long-term outcomes. This study applies the Self-Sufficiency Standard developed by Washington State University to calculate actual self-sufficiency rates, providing a data-driven basis for agencies to advocate for improvements to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).

Maria Catalina Rojas

Under the direction of Professor Zach Mampilly

Teeter-Totter Between Coercion and Governance: A Comparative Analysis of ISIS and the Taliban

This study examines the differing outcomes of ISIS and the Taliban. ISIS's rapid rise and fall led to the dismantling of its Caliphate, while the Taliban has sustained governance in Afghanistan since 2021. The research investigates how these groups used governance and violence as mechanisms for resource mobilization and military strategies, analyzing the factors that shaped their stability. By comparing ISIS's reliance on terror campaigns with the Taliban's prolonged insurgency, the study offers insights into conditions enabling insurgencies to transition into stable, long-term governance models, contributing to academic and policy discussions on political violence and state-building.

Owen Maireni Daniel Sanchez

Under the direction of Professor Carla Robbins

Reading President Trump in China and Taiwan

Some analysts have warned that President Trump's threats to take over the Panama Canal and territorial ambitions for Greenland could be read by China's leadership as license to take over Taiwan. This capstone seeks to understand what the publics in China and Taiwan are learning from news sources about the American President's positions on these two issues—and whether his rhetoric is shaping the discussion of the Taiwan Straits conflict in either or both countries. The research analyzes news articles published during the first 100 days of the Trump Administration in China's Xinhua News Agency and Global Times and Taiwan's Taipei Times and United Daily News.

Dylan Selewonik

Under the direction of Professor Zach Mampilly

European Union Foreign Policy: Theoretical Approaches to Cooperation

This paper examines how individual EU member states cooperate on foreign policy by analyzing case studies from 2009 to 2022 through realism, liberalism, and constructivism. While previous research focused on EU institutions, this study addresses the gap concerning state-level behavior. Findings show cooperation is contextual: larger states tend to align with liberalism and constructivism, while smaller states often reflect realism. Politically influential countries such as France and Poland shape EU foreign policy more effectively than others. NATO also plays a role, depending on how member states perceive security threats and the desirability of deeper European integration.

Nicole Tomazi

Under the direction of Professor Carla Robbins

Is Nuclear Proliferation Inevitable If the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Acquires a Fuel Cycle? Lessons Learned from Nuclear Programs in Brazil, Japan and South Korea

Saudi Arabia has long sought US help in building what it says would be a civilian nuclear program. Negotiations stalled during the Biden administration due to Riyadh's insistence on producing nuclear fuel—a potential path to nuclear weapons. The Trump administration may now move ahead with an agreement. This capstone looks at three countries with nuclear programs that might have “gone rogue” but didn't, Brazil, Japan and South Korea, and identifies the mixture of international incentives and pressures that persuaded each to accept stringent nonproliferation restrictions, and in the case of South Korea forgo fuel production.

Shelby Truitt

Under the direction of Professor Carla Robbins

Scaling Clean Energy: Regulatory Insights from Southeast Asia

This capstone examines the disparity in foreign investment across Southeast Asia's renewable energy sector, despite common climate goals and comparable clean energy potential, emphasizing how foundational regulatory policies influence investor confidence. Through case studies of Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand, the research demonstrates how even modest reforms around transparency, intellectual property, and expatriate support can influence the scaling of clean energy innovation beyond manufacturing. Findings can be utilized by policymakers in emerging markets aiming to attract investment and foster commercialization in similar politically uncertain environments.

Bernarda Fiallo Valverde

Under the direction of Professor Rob Smith

Trump's Forced Family Separation Policy and the Lasting Impact on Migrant Children

This thesis examines the long-term effects of the Trump administration's zero-tolerance policy, which led to the separation of immigrant families between 2017-2019. Using the frameworks of legal violence and child development, it analyzes how government agencies implemented and justified the policy, the harm it caused to children, and the challenges of reunification. The research highlights the psychological, developmental, and legal consequences that continue to impact these families today. This work is dedicated to my family and all the immigrant families whose resilience, sacrifice, and love inspire everything I do.

Master of Science in Higher Education Administration

The HEA capstone culminates in a comprehensive resource manual that draws from scholarly research and expert interviews and combines infographics, annotated resources, and multimedia content to serve as an accessible reference for both practitioners and student populations.

Guides for Students

Fernanda Silveira Cardoso

Under the direction of Professor Casey Boland

Navigating College with a Disability: A Guide for Empowerment and Accessibility

Navigating college with a disability often means facing added barriers—misinformation, inaccessible systems, and the constant need to self-advocate. This guide offers practical tools, key legal context, and everyday strategies to foster empowerment, access, and student success. Whether you support students as an educator, advisor, or family member, this resource is designed to enhance your understanding and help create a more accessible, inclusive college experience.

Sabikha Khatun

Under the direction of Professor Ryan Coughlan

Working Professionals in Graduate Programs

This resource manual is for current and prospective graduate students at CUNY who are balancing employment with advanced study. Often referred to as non-traditional students, working students, or working professionals face unique challenges as they navigate graduate education alongside full- or part-time jobs. The manual is designed to help working students identify pathways that align with their career goals, manage competing demands, and thrive academically and professionally.

Christopher Rodriguez

Under the direction of Professor Casey Boland

Flipping the Script: Public College Initiatives Supporting Men of Color

This guide aims to showcase a collection of culturally responsive public college initiatives in New York City with a proven track record for yielding successful outcomes for men of Color. The goal is to make these resources readily available to families, educators, and administrators working closely with students from underrepresented populations. While this guide promotes some notable programs, we should not ignore the need to advocate for institutional-wide change through policy revisions, strategic planning, and a broader commitment to educate, advocate, and pursue justice. Only then will we truly flip the script.

Natalia Snyder (Cardenas)

Under the direction of Professor Casey Boland

Enhancing Retention and Success: A Resource Manual for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Offices in Higher Education

This strategic guide supports DEI offices at CUNY, SUNY, and similar institutions in boosting retention among minority and first-generation students. Drawing on research and the author's experience, it offers actionable strategies like identity-conscious advising, early alerts, mentorship, and inclusive training. Emphasizing collaboration and culturally responsive practices, the manual addresses systemic barriers and urges institutions to embed equity into student success initiatives.

Lilit Ter Vardanyan

Under the direction of Professor Ryan Coughlan

AI and Student Learning

This capstone project explores the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, on student learning outcomes in higher education. The manual emphasizes the importance of developing digital literacy and ethical use of AI to enhance, rather than replace, critical thinking and original work. When guided effectively, AI can support personalized learning, increase efficiency, and improve academic performance. This manual gives practical tips and insights to help students use AI to boost their learning, stay creative, and succeed in their academic journey.

Naydelin Veras

Under the direction of Professor Ryan Coughlan

Expandiendo Caminos: Empowering Latina Graduate Students Through Mentorship

This project explores diverse mentorship models and the role of culturally responsive mentorship in supporting Latina graduate students. Although graduate enrollment among Latina women is increasing, Latinas remain underrepresented in academia due to a persistent gap between student demographics and faculty diversity. Mentorship serves as a critical tool for addressing systemic disparities in higher education. Grounded in Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework, the manual examines how various forms of capital are cultivated through peer, alumni, formal, and informal mentorship. The manual offers guidance to help Latina graduate students seek and sustain meaningful mentorship.

Guides for Faculty

Michelle Almanzar

Under the direction of Professor Casey Boland

Proactive Advisement Strategies: A Guide to Student Success and Retention

The purpose of this research manual is to provide staff, faculty, and students with information on proactive advisement techniques that can be implemented within the institution to help students acclimate to the school environment. Additionally, it offers tools to support students in achieving college success. By utilizing and applying these strategies, you can enhance student support, improve retention, and ensure students have access to essential services.

Joshua Amador

Under the direction of Professor Ryan Coughlan

Culturally Rooted Peer Mentorship in Latine Student Success

This project examines the benefits of peer mentorship programs on Latino students in higher education, emphasizing the importance of culturally relevant mentorship models. Peer mentorship is identified as a crucial factor in student success, offering academic, social, and emotional support. The resource manual highlights the barriers Latino students face, including socioeconomic challenges, language and cultural barriers, and institutional and systemic obstacles. Through the manual, students and practitioners will learn how by improving critical consciousness, students can advocate for themselves and others who may also need peer support.

Dennis Barnes

Under the direction of Professor Casey Boland

Creating Short-Term Faculty Led Study Abroad Programs

This resource manual provides the basics for designing a short-term international study experience—from program design to logistics to program administration. This manual is for educators who know that through a well curated study abroad program they will be able to instill in their students the values of global citizenship and cultural awareness.

Alicia Blandon

Under the direction of Professor Ryan Coughlan

Dual Identities, Singular Struggles: Enhancing Support for Biracial Asian Students in Higher Education

This manual explores the unique challenges faced by students of both Black and Asian descent. The project examines how layered stereotypes, identity development, and institutional barriers impact their college experiences. Using frameworks like Poston's Biracial Identity Development Model and AsianCrit, the study aims to inform higher education policies and support services that better recognize and serve the needs of biracial students, ultimately fostering a stronger sense of belonging and success on campus.

Bianca Castro

Under the direction of Professor Ryan Coughlan

Bridging the Gap: Supporting Vertical Transfers in CUNY

This manual is for student affairs professionals working in transfer centers or support roles at four-year colleges. It offers practical, research-based strategies to better support vertical transfer students—those coming from community colleges. With a focus on integration, belonging, transition planning, and targeted support, the guide is grounded in Tinto’s student departure and retention theories. It provides tools and recommendations to help staff strengthen retention efforts and create a more intentional, supportive experience for transfer students navigating their new campus.

Julia Cuttone

Under the direction of Professor Ryan Coughlan

Overcoming Limited Funding and Resources for Division III Student-Athletes Mental Health

Student-athletes at NCAA Division III institutions are facing growing mental health challenges but often lack the resources available to their Division I and II counterparts. While all three divisions share similar academic and athletic demands, only Divisions I and II offer athletic scholarships and benefit from greater institutional funding. Division III athletes experience comparable levels of stress, and time demands but have access to fewer mental health professionals and limited sport psychology services. This disparity creates a critical gap in care. Addressing this issue is crucial, as untreated mental health struggles can impact overall success and well-being.

Pamela Drake

Under the direction of Professor Casey Boland

Harnessing the Accreditation Process for Professional Growth

The project titled “Harnessing the Accreditation Process for Professional Growth” by Pamela Drake is a comprehensive manual aimed at helping higher education professionals leverage institutional accreditation as a tool for career development through the lens of Human Capital Theory (HCT). The project reframes the accreditation process—often seen as burdensome—as a powerful professional development opportunity. Though focused on higher education professionals involved in accreditation, the manual’s strategies are adaptable to anyone seeking to enhance their human capital through workplace opportunities.

Fatima Mendez

Under the direction of Professor Ryan Coughlan

Pre-Graduate Advising: Se Necesita Un Pueblo to Support Latinx and Underrepresented Minority Students to Graduate School

Between 2012 and 2022, underrepresented minority (URM) graduate enrollment dropped by 4.7%, showing fewer URM students are pursuing graduate education. My resource manual explores how advisors can better assist URM students by focusing on advising styles, cultural competency, and key resources. I use Bourdieu’s Social Reproduction theory to examine how advising can disrupt barriers—especially now, as the February 2025 Dear Colleague Letter calls institutions to confront structural inequality. Insights from Xavier Hamilton at Columbia SPS highlight the need for intentional advising.

Carson Mounce

Under the direction of Professor Ryan Coughlan

Integrating Community Engagement into Academic Departments

This manual reflects what I've come to value most in higher education: its role in serving the public good. Created for academic department chairs, it offers guidance for integrating community engagement into faculty research, teaching, and service. It also explores ways to support this work through tenure policies and strategic planning. I created this resource manual because I believe restoring trust in higher education means centering collaboration, shared knowledge, and reciprocal relationships with the public.

Danielle Taira

Under the direction of Professor Ryan Coughlan

Expanding Experiential Learning in Higher Education

This resource manual supports undergraduate faculty in integrating experiential learning, especially at institutions serving underrepresented students. It addresses common concerns about the relevance of higher education and prepares students for real-world challenges. Through recent outcomes, student feedback, faculty insights, and curated resources, it highlights high-impact practices that promote inclusion, reflection, and innovation. The resource manual encourages faculty to explore, adapt, and collaborate to enhance academic rigor and relevance in and beyond the classroom.

About Our Capstone Project

Capstone projects are our graduating students' culminating opportunity to integrate their knowledge from the program and apply their critical analysis and communication skills. MPA and MIA capstones involve policy research, intensive study of an organization, a proposal to address a problem of local or global significance, or a combination of these. HEA capstones synthesize scholarly research and expert interviews to develop a public-facing resource to serve higher-education professionals and students.



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Marxe School's mission is to educate and empower leaders, advance knowledge about societies and policies, and engage diverse communities across New York City and the world to develop inclusive, adaptable, and effective institutions.

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