

Week 14: Capstone: integrated governance, privacy, and ethics program proposals

Section 6: Capstone

Fourteen weeks of analysis, applied to a real organization, presented and critiqued.

Capstone design principle. The rubric rewards proposals that sit inside the tensions the course has identified rather than resolving them too cleanly. Governance, privacy, and ethics will conflict in your organization. The best proposals name those conflicts honestly, make reasoned trade-offs, and build governance programs that are real rather than performative. Proposals that resolve all conflicts, treat ethics as a compliance checklist, or propose governance structures without enforcement mechanisms will not score well regardless of how comprehensive they appear.

Week 14 is the culmination of fourteen weeks of analytical work. Student teams present integrated governance program proposals that address all three pillars — governance, privacy, and ethics — for a realistic case organization. The proposals draw directly from the weekly assessments building since Week 3: the legal gap analysis, the governance gap analysis, the data quality accountability chain, the AI acceptable use policy, the cloud architecture map, and the professional ethics analysis.

The capstone is not a research paper. It is a governance program proposal — the kind of document a governance professional would present to an organization’s leadership to make the case for a specific governance architecture. It should be specific, realistic, and honest about trade-offs. It should show where the three pillars conflict and make reasoned recommendations about those conflicts. It should not pretend that governance is simple.

Two presentation tracks are available. The standard track uses a realistic but constructed case organization. The federal/government track uses an organization modeled on an agency that has experienced governance failures documented in the course — a DOGE-style access event, an OPM-style breach, or a benefits system with documented data quality failures. Peer critique is a graded component: every student serves as a designated reviewer for at least one other team’s proposal, applying the structured rubric.

SESSION STRUCTURE

Data Privacy, Ethics & Governance — Week 14 Summary

Hours 1–2 — Student presentations, first half

Each team presents 20 minutes. A peer critique panel (two designated student reviewers) responds for 5 minutes using the structured rubric. The instructor adds 5 minutes of feedback. Four teams in two hours.

Hours 3–4 — Student presentations, second half

Same format; the remaining teams present. Final 30 minutes: an invited practitioner or policy expert provides cross-cutting feedback on all proposals. Final 15 minutes: the instructor closes the semester.

Closing remarks

After the practitioner feedback, the closing does three things. First, return to the Week 1 thesis: every failure had a predecessor; the technology changes and the pattern does not. Did the course's cases confirm that thesis or challenge it? Second, name what has changed in the world since Week 1 — the live cases that developed during the semester — and ask what the course's frameworks say about them. Third, name what the course did not resolve: the mathematical impossibility of satisfying all fairness definitions simultaneously, the structural inadequacy of professional codes, the governance seam that no current framework fully addresses. Students who leave with open questions they can name precisely are more prepared than students who leave with settled answers.

Capstone proposal structure

Twelve sections, each building from the weekly assessments since Week 3.

1. Executive summary

One page. The organization, the governance problem it faces, and the proposal's central argument. Must name where the three pillars conflict in this organization — not just where they align. (All three pillars.)

2. Organization and context

The organization's data environment: what data it holds, what regulatory framework applies, what cloud environment it operates in, and the current governance posture.

(Governance builds from the Week 3 gap analysis and the Week 12 cloud map.)

3. Governance structure

The proposed governance architecture: roles, accountability chains, oversight mechanisms, and the three failure modes the design addresses. Must distinguish between governance on paper and governance in practice. (Governance · builds from Week 6.)

4. Privacy compliance posture

The organization's legal obligations, the gaps between obligation and current practice, and the mechanisms that close them. Must address the data broker middle if applicable. (Privacy · builds from Week 3.)

5. Privacy engineering

Which privacy engineering techniques are applicable, which are implemented, and which gaps remain. Must evaluate the credibility of any privacy claims the organization makes. (Privacy · builds from Week 4.)

6. Data quality and accountability

The data quality posture: which dimensions are weakest, what decisions are driven by quality failures, and what accountability attaches when those decisions cause harm. (Governance · Ethics · builds from Week 7.)

7. AI governance

The AI posture: what systems are deployed or planned, what LLM risks apply, what the EU AI Act requires, and what the acceptable use policy provides. (All three · builds from Week 11.)

8. Cloud governance and supply chain

The cloud governance architecture, the supply chain risks, and the shared responsibility gaps. Must address the governance seam between the primary cloud environment and any third-party AI or data providers. (Governance · Privacy · builds from Week 12.)

9. Ethical framework

The ethical framework the organization's data practices are evaluated against. Must identify at least one practice that is legally compliant but ethically contested, and apply two Week 2 frameworks to it. Must not treat ethics as a compliance checklist. (Ethics · builds from Weeks 2 and 9.)

10. Professional ethics and accountability

The professional ethics obligations of the organization's data practitioners, the whistleblower protection mechanism, and the institutional structure that makes ethical action possible without requiring heroism. (Ethics · builds from Week 13.)

11. Where the pillars conflict

The most important section. Identify at least two places where governance, privacy, and ethics point in different directions for this organization. Explain the conflict, evaluate the trade-off, and make a reasoned recommendation. Do not resolve the conflicts too cleanly. (All three · builds from the entire course.)

12. Implementation roadmap

A 12-month implementation sequence with priorities, dependencies, and accountability assignments. Must distinguish between quick wins, medium-term structural changes, and long-term cultural shifts, and address the organizational change-management problem. (Governance · builds from all prior assessments.)

A note on Section 11. Where the pillars conflict is the most important section and the one that will most clearly separate proposals that have engaged seriously with the course from those that have not. Every organization on this course's timeline faced conflicts between governance efficiency and privacy protection, between security and transparency, between ethical obligation and legal compliance. If a proposal does not identify at least two places where the pillars conflict in its specific organization, it has not engaged seriously with the material.

Presentation tracks

Standard track: any realistic organization the team has analyzed throughout the semester. The organization should be specific enough that the governance, privacy, and

legal analysis is concrete — not a generic “company” but a named or clearly described entity with a real data environment.

Federal / government track: an organization modeled on a federal agency or government entity that has experienced governance failures documented in the course. Recommended scenarios:

- A federal civilian agency that has experienced a DOGE-style extralegal access event: propose the governance architecture that should have prevented it and the recovery program that follows.
- An agency with OPM-style technical debt and security posture failures: propose the modernization governance program addressing security, data quality, and accountability.
- A state benefits system with documented data quality failures (modeled on Michigan UIA): propose the governance and accountability framework that addresses the harm chain.
- A defense contractor in a high-assurance government cloud deploying a third-party AI system: propose the AI governance framework that spans the cloud boundary.

Grading rubric

Framework application (20%)

Distinguished: all relevant frameworks from Weeks 1–13 are applied accurately and explicitly, as analytical tools rather than decorative references. The proposal does not cite frameworks it does not apply.

Does not meet: frameworks are named but not applied, applied inaccurately, or missing from sections where they are directly relevant.

Pillar integration (20%)

Distinguished: all three pillars are addressed in every major section; the interaction between pillars is analyzed, not just listed; Section 11 demonstrates genuine engagement with the tensions.

Does not meet: pillars are addressed in separate sections without integration; or Section 11 resolves conflicts too cleanly; or ethics is treated as a compliance checklist.

Analytical precision (20%)

Distinguished: claims are specific, evidence-based, and falsifiable. The proposal identifies the specific governance gap, the specific legal obligation, the specific ethical framework. Vague assertions are absent.

Does not meet: claims are general or unsupported; assertions are made without identifying the specific mechanism that produces the problem or the specific control that addresses it.

Governance design quality (20%)

Distinguished: proposed structures distinguish between governance on paper and governance in practice; every proposed control has an enforcement mechanism; the roadmap is realistic and sequenced; the professional ethics section addresses institutional structure, not just individual obligation.

Does not meet: controls lack enforcement mechanisms; the roadmap is aspirational without sequencing; the professional ethics section reduces to “practitioners should act ethically” without structural design.

Sitting in the tension (20%)

Distinguished: the proposal demonstrates the course’s central argument in practice — it identifies where the pillars conflict, makes a reasoned recommendation, and acknowledges what it costs. It does not resolve conflicts too cleanly or pretend they do not exist.

Does not meet: the proposal resolves all conflicts; or treats tensions as problems to be eliminated rather than trade-offs to be managed; or reaches conclusions that are analytically convenient rather than analytically defensible.

On ethics as compliance. The rubric penalizes proposals that treat ethics as a compliance checklist. A proposal whose ethics section reduces to “we comply with applicable laws and professional codes” has not engaged with the course’s central argument. The ethics section should identify at least one practice that is legally compliant but ethically contested, apply two ethical frameworks to it, and make a reasoned recommendation about what the organization should do. That is what ethics in governance looks like.

Peer critique

Every student serves as a designated reviewer for at least one other team's proposal. Peer critique is graded. Reviewers apply the following questions.

For the governance and privacy sections

- Does the proposed governance structure distinguish between governance on paper and governance in practice?
- Does every proposed control have an enforcement mechanism? If not, which controls are performative?
- Does the privacy section address the aggregation problem, or only individual data practices in isolation?
- Does the cloud governance section address the seam between the primary environment and any third-party AI or data providers?

For the ethics section and Section 11

- Does the ethics section identify a practice that is legally compliant but ethically contested — or does it treat compliance as sufficient?
- Does Section 11 identify genuine conflicts between the pillars, or list tensions without engaging the trade-offs?
- Does the professional ethics section propose a governance structure, or reduce to “practitioners should act ethically”?
- Does the proposal sit inside the tensions honestly, or resolve them too cleanly in a way that is analytically convenient?

The course's argument, stated at the end

Every data governance failure on this course's timeline had a governance structure in place that was supposed to prevent it. The technology changes. The pattern does not: crisis justifies collection, collection enables abuse, abuse eventually comes to light, law is passed too late and enforced too weakly, and the cycle repeats.

The course's answer to that pattern is not pessimism. It is precision. Practitioners who understand the structural conditions that produce governance failures — absence of oversight, purpose creep, aggregation, enforcement gaps — can design governance programs that address those conditions rather than perform compliance. Practitioners who understand the

ethical frameworks can evaluate decisions that legality cannot. Practitioners who understand the human cost can treat governance as a matter of consequence rather than a checklist.

The best proposals will not resolve the tensions the course has identified. They will sit inside them honestly, make reasoned trade-offs, and build governance programs that are real rather than performative. That is what governance looks like from the inside. That is what this course has been preparing students to do.

Assignment

Enter the course code to unlock assignments.