Department of Public Administration

Capstone Project
Fall 2015
Request for Proposal

Does your organization collect data that no one has time to analyze? Do you have projects that get postponed due to a lack of resources? Need expertise to assess a management or financial challenge facing your organization? We can help!

Capstone projects are learning in action. The Capstone provides masters students with experiences that allow them to integrate classroom learning with a relevant problem solving experience in a professional work situation. Over the course of one semester, MPA students work in teams to address organizational challenges, identify opportunities for a client organization, conduct research on a pressing management issue, and analyze data. Capstone projects contribute to students' professional training, offer organizations the opportunity to access MPA expertise, and strengthen the relationships between the Department of Public Administration and organizations around the city, state, and region.

The UIC Department of Administration requires all graduating MPA students to complete a capstone course. This course gives students the opportunity to work on practical problems, applying their new skills to work with local organizations. Our students are specifically trained in public management, local government management, financial management, information management, and survey research methods. The Capstone requires students to blend these different areas of learning in a work setting that involves real time, unpredictable situations, and all the complexity of the real world.

The capstone class is a fifteen-week course for graduate students. Students enroll in the course during the last two semesters of the MPA program at which point they have successfully completed essential statistics, budgeting, and managerial classes. Students work together in groups of 3 – 4 students on projects proposed by organizations in the non-profit or government sector. With the support of faculty, project teams develop a work plan that includes defining the problem, framing the project into a work plan, and presenting the final project.

MPA Capstone Program Timeline

- **June 12, 2015**   RFP process begins. Organizations interested in an MPA Capstone Project must submit a MPA Capstone Proposal (available at http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/pa/current_students/capstone.html).
- **July 17, 2015:** Deadline for proposal submission.
- **August 21, 2015**   Clients notified of Capstone award or rejection.
- **August 21, 2015**   Students assigned to Capstone teams. MPA Capstone Projects begin; successful applicants are expected to meet with students to develop memorandum of understanding sometime in January.
- **December 7-11, 2015:** MPA Capstone presentations to clients.

Apply for an MPA Capstone Project

Organizations must complete and submit a written project proposal for consideration.

Applications are available at: http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/pa/current_students/capstone.html

Department of Public Administration

Ideal MPA Capstone Proposals

1. Are achievable within the framework of one academic semester (10 weeks - to allow enough time for a final presentation and any revisions the organization may request)
2. Have the necessary resources available to support the Capstone team.
3. Have a clear definition of the problem or issue being addressed.
4. Are specific about what the Capstone team is to accomplish or deliver.
5. Require the use of data collection and analytical skills.
6. Have the support of organizational leadership, including a contact person at the agency who will act as the point person for the project.

Things to Consider:

- We might receive more proposals than we can accommodate given the number of available student teams, or proposed projects may require particular skills that are not represented among students taking the course. Thus, we cannot guarantee that a proposal will be chosen. However, projects can be reconsidered the following semester or converted into a student internship.
- All Capstone clients must designate one person in the organization who will act as the project liaison. The project liaison is expected to act as the main contact person to the Capstone Team.
- Students' will present their findings to the client at the end of the semester. Each Capstone team will be required to write a report and create a visual presentation that describes the project's purpose, methodology, key insights and recommendations.
- The final work produced by the Capstone team is owned by the Capstone client organization. However, the UIC Department of Public Administration will publicly list the organization as a client, keep copies of all Capstone teams' final reports for review by the UIC community, and include a brief project description in the Capstone promotional materials. Students will be allowed to use the work produced for their Capstone client in pursuit of their academic or professional careers.

Questions?

If you have additional questions about the MPA Capstone Research Program, please contact:

James Thompson, Associate Professor
Department of Public Administration
412 S. Peoria (M/C 278), Chicago, IL 60607
Email: jthomp@uic.edu
Phone: (312) 355-0304

MPA Program Website: http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/pa/department/department.html

MPA Capstone Website: http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/pa/current_students/capstone.html

Shared Expectations

The MPA Capstone Project brings together groups of people working together toward a common goal. These working groups form a community that is sustained by responsibilities and commitments necessary for success. The stakeholder groups that must work together to make the Capstone Project successful include: clients, students, faculty and the UIC Department of Public Administration program staff. Strong commitment, good communication and clear understanding of duties amongst group members are essential to successful MPA Capstone Projects. The stakeholders and responsibilities are as follows:

MPA Students
- Provide commitment, time and effort.
- Utilize knowledge, skills, and experience to best serve the client.
- Develop professionally by listening to clients, and remaining open to new information or suggestions from clients, faculty, and Capstone team members.
- Be willing to re-negotiate and/or revise the original project proposal as needed.
- Produce a finished report that advances the mission of the client organization.

Faculty
- Provide a learning environment that both supports and challenges the development of professional graduate students.
- Establish classroom meeting times, on-line learning, activities and assignments that give students an overall framework within which to work and develop, and address the particular needs of their projects.
- Support the client and its Capstone Team as needed in order to ensure that the project is moving forward toward success. This includes acting as a liaison between the client organization and student Capstone team as needed.
- Provide students with support and feedback, in addition to their final grade.

Clients
- Propose a high-quality, reasonable project.
- Identify a responsive staff liaison to work with the Capstone Team.
- Support open communication with the Capstone Team.
- Be willing to renegotiate or revise the project when necessary.
- Provide useful feedback during the course of the project and an evaluation of the Capstone Team at the end of the project.

UIC and the Department of Public Administration Program Staff
- Provide a supportive academic environment and a set of supports, including related courses that contribute to the MPA Capstone's success.
- Outline clear student expectations.
- Support clients, students and faculty.
- Ensure students have the resources necessary for the Capstone Projects overall goals.
- Ensure open feedback to other stakeholders engaged in the process.

More specific work agreements that outline the mutual responsibilities amongst stakeholders must be created so that all stakeholders are clear on their obligations to all others involved in the Capstone project.