

# UIC College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs

## Urban and Public Affairs Program

### Capstone Overview

Capstone is learning in action providing students with experiences that allows them to integrate classroom learning with a relevant problem solving experience in an actual work situation. Over the course of an academic year, students work in teams to address organizational challenges, identify opportunities for a client organization, and conduct research on a pressing social question. Capstone projects contribute to students' education, but also the greater public good.

For students majoring in the Urban and Public Affairs undergraduate program at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), the senior capstone project is an opportunity to build professional skills in different areas: community needs or policy analysis; project management and team work; methods of gathering, analyzing and reporting data; community organizing or building citizen participation. 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.

Students work together in groups of 2 – 4 students identifying and finding solutions or recommendations on challenging issues faced 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 finding effective solutions that result in a final project.

### **What is the Capstone Program?**

The capstone course gives students a service learning opportunity. In the core curriculum of the undergraduate program in Urban and Public Affairs (UPA) students have critical and applied learning experiences. Over the course of an academic year, students will work in teams – either to address challenges, identify problems and opportunities, or conduct research on a social concern.

Capstone teams are comprised of 2 – 4 UPA students completing the last two semesters of their Bachelor of Arts degree. Students majoring in UPA have a common desire to make a difference in the communities in which they live and with this common goal are committed to acquiring the skills necessary to transform their personal commitment into public leadership and community services.

# UIC College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs

## Urban and Public Affairs Program

### What is the Capstone Program timeline?

- **June 2009:** RFP process begins. Agencies interested in a Capstone Project must submit a written Capstone proposal that follows the application guidelines.
- **July 2009:** Deadline for proposal submissions.
- **July-August 2009:** Proposals are reviewed by faculty.
- **August 2009:** Faculty discusses proposals with prospective clients for clarification and scope of projects. Selected projects are presented to senior UPA students.
- **August-September 2009:** Students select projects they are interested in working on. Clients are notified if their project has been chosen.
- **October 2009:** Breakfast with all Capstone Clients.
- **April 2010:** Senior Capstone Projects conclude.
- **May 2010:** Senior Capstone Presentation before faculty and Capstone Clients.

### How Does an Organization Apply for a Student Capstone Team?

Organizations must complete and submit a project proposal for consideration. (See Capstone Proposal Guidelines on page 5).

### When are Project proposals due?

For the 2009 – 2010 academic year proposals are due by July 31, 2009.

### What can organizations expect from a Capstone Team and what can students expect from organizations?

Capstone teams are not employees, interns or independent contractors of the Capstone client organization. This means all teams will have to develop and negotiate a scope of work agreement with the Capstone client organization. Capstone teams will work hard to complete the project as described in the work plan and will inform the client of any problems that arise that would change the scope of services in the original agreement. Client organizations agree to provide the assistance and access to information necessary for the Capstone teams to perform effectively.

### What is a good Capstone Project?

Capstone projects need to be achievable within the framework of one academic year and have the necessary resources available to support the Capstone team; have a clear definition of the problem or issue being addressed; be specific about what the Capstone team is to accomplish or deliver. Capstone projects cannot include requests for interns, administrative support work, only one student instead of a team of students, or organizations that cannot provide appropriate support to the Capstone team efforts.

# UIC College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs

## Urban and Public Affairs Program

### Things to Consider:

- We might receive more proposals than we have student teams so we cannot guarantee that a proposal will be chosen. However, it might be possible for some projects to be reconsidered and 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.
- Capstone clients will be invited to attend a Capstone breakfast during the fall 2009 semester and a presentation of the students' project at the end of the spring 2010 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 Urban and Public Affairs undergraduate program reserves the right to publicly list the organization as a client, to keep copies of all Capstone teams' final reports for review of the UIC community, and to include a brief project description in the Capstone promotional materials. Furthermore, students will be allowed to use the work produced for their Capstone client in pursuit of their academic or professional careers.

### Who should you contact with questions?

If you have any additional questions about the Capstone Program please contact Valerie Werner, Director of UPA, Assistant Dean of Student Services at 312.413.2292 or at [vwerne1@uic.edu](mailto:vwerne1@uic.edu).

# UIC College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs

## Urban and Public Affairs Program

### Shared Expectations

The 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 work together to make the Capstone Project a success are: clients, students, faculty and the UIC Urban and Public Affairs program staff. Strong commitment, good communication and clear understanding of duties amongst group members are essential to successful Capstone Projects. The stakeholders and responsibilities are as follows:

#### *Students*

- Commitment, time and effort.
- Range of knowledge, skills and experience.
- Dedication to growing professionally by listening to their clients, and remaining open to new information or suggestions from their client, faculty or group members.
- Be willing to re-negotiate and/or revise the original project proposal as needed.
- Produce a finished report that moves forward the mission of the client organization.

#### *Faculty*

- Provide a learning environment that both supports and challenges students' educational development.
- 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.
- Give support to 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 a session with students for reflection and feedback in addition to their final grade.

#### *Clients*

- A high-quality, reasonable project.
- An identified staff liaison to work with the Capstone Team.
- Support for and open communication with the Capstone Team.
- Willingness to renegotiate or revise the project when necessary.
- Useful feedback during the course of the project and an evaluation of the Capstone Team at the end of the project.

#### *UIC and the UPA Program Staff*

- A supportive academic environment and a set of supports, including related courses that contribute to the Capstone's success.
- Clear student expectations.
- Staff support to clients, students and faculty.
- Resources that support the Capstone Projects overall goals.
- 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.

# UIC College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs

## Urban and Public Affairs Program

### 2009 – 2010 Capstone Proposal Guidelines

#### Proposal Instructions:

1. Single-space your proposal, number all pages, and keep the proposal to no more than four pages in length.
2. Respond to all request items in the order listed.
3. Use headings as provided.
4. Do not include any materials other than those specifically requested at this time.
5. Email complete proposals to Valerie Werner at [vwerne1@uic.edu](mailto:vwerne1@uic.edu) by July 31, 2008. Write "Capstone Proposal" in the Subject line of your email.

#### Proposal Requirements

##### Page 1:

##### I. **Applicant Contact Information**

Please include all of the following requested contact and organizational information:

- A. Date of Application
- B. Organization Name and Address
- C. Organization Website
- D. Project Liaison Name, Title and Contact information including phone and fax number and email address.

##### II. **Proposal Abstract (50 – 75 words)**

Describe the key points of your proposal.

##### III. **Project Field**

Using the following eight classifications, please name the field of your proposed project to the best of your ability. Since a proposal may fall into more than one classification, please specify all that may apply.

- |                          |                   |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| A. Community Development | E. Management     |
| B. Health                | F. Nonprofit      |
| C. Government            | G. Policy         |
| D. International         | H. Urban Planning |
|                          | I. Other          |

##### Page 2:

##### IV. **Organizational Description (1 page)**

On a separate sheet, please describe your organization or unit, including mission, scope of work, key program activities and target population.

# UIC College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs

## Urban and Public Affairs Program

### Page 3:

#### V. **Capstone Project Overview** (1 page)

On a separate sheet, please describe the scope of the project that you would like a Capstone Project Team to focus on. Please include:

- A. A brief overview of the issue or problem.
- B. Why this issue is of particular relevance to your organization at this time and the practical implications of this issue or problem.
- C. Potential activities the Capstone Team might engage in (i.e. conduct literature review, create and deliver surveys, create a database).
- D. Specific skills or qualifications that would be helpful for the Capstone Team to have in order to address this problem (i.e. knowledge of specific computer software, statistics, experience in your organizations issue area).

### Page 4:

#### VI. **Desired Outcomes** (1/2 page)

On a separate sheet, please describe the deliverables that are expected of the Capstone Team at the completion of the project (i.e. survey or evaluation instruments, draft policies or procedures, resource lists, analysis of datasets, a comprehensive report, recommendations on how to proceed, etc).

#### VII. **Special Considerations** (1/2 page)

If applicable, please describe any special considerations that UIC – UPA and/or the Capstone Team should be aware of. This may include:

- A. Anticipated obstacles that a Capstone Team might encounter in examining this issue (i.e. incomplete data, organizational culture, staff turnover, etc.).
- B. Whether a significant portion of work must be done during regular business hours.
- C. Whether the Capstone Team will have access to private data that may inhibit progress on the project, and how/when you plan to have approval for the Capstone Team to proceed with conducting research given potential obstacles.
- D. Whether the Capstone Team will be required to visit multiple locations, other than the primary client site, to conduct their research and complete their project.

### **Questions?**

If you have any questions about the Capstone Project course, please contact: Valerie Werner, Director of Urban and Public Affairs, Interim Assistant Dean of Student Services, at [vwerne1@uic.edu](mailto:vwerne1@uic.edu) or at 312.413.2292.