

CAPSTONE

Proposal Guidelines

2011-2012

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CAPSTONE OVERVIEW

Capstone is learning in action. Part of the core curriculum of the Masters program at NYU Wagner, it provides students with both a critical learning experience and an opportunity to perform a public service. Over the course of an academic year, students work in teams - either to address challenges and identify opportunities for a client organization or to conduct research on a pressing social question. Ultimately, Capstone contributes not only to the students' education, but also to the public good.

In architecture, the capstone is the crowning piece of an arch, the center stone that holds the arch together, giving it shape and strength. NYU Wagner's Capstone program plays a similar role, by integrating and enhancing student learning in several different arenas: a content or issue area; key process skills including project management and teamwork; and methods for gathering, analyzing and reporting data. Capstone requires students to interweave their learning in all these areas, and to do so in real time, in an unpredictable, complex real world environment.

Capstone brings together teams of 3-5 graduate students to address complex challenges and identify new opportunities for nonprofit, governmental, health-related, urban planning, and international agencies. Project teams approach their assignments with initiative and professionalism, and they organize and frame the project into a thorough work plan that results in a carefully considered final product. Every team produces a written report and conducts a final presentation of their findings and recommendations.

ABOUT NYU WAGNER

Established in 1938 as the Graduate School of Public Administration and renamed the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service in 1989, NYU Wagner offers graduate degree programs in public and nonprofit management and policy, health policy and management, and urban planning. The one unifying goal and central mission of the school is to prepare leaders for professional careers in public, nonprofit, planning, and health institutions. The school offers a much broader set of academic opportunities than many other traditional schools of public policy, urban planning, or health policy and management, which often exist as separate divisions of a university.

NYU Wagner is dedicated to preparing students to address the serious issues facing society today. The academic programs emphasize a mix of theory and practice, so that students can build a portfolio based on their curriculum and real-world experience in their specific area of interest. Our programs also take a multifaceted approach, one that crosses boundaries by design. Locating specific programs in a general school of public service exposes students to a broad curriculum, facilitating nuanced views often lacking from narrower approaches.

NYU Wagner offers advanced programs leading to the following professional degrees:

- Master of Public Administration in Public and Nonprofit Management and Policy
- Master of Public Administration in Health Policy and Management
- Master of Urban Planning
- Executive Master of Public Administration
- Ph.D. in Public Administration

CAPSTONE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS THE CAPSTONE PROGRAM? WHO COMPRISES A CAPSTONE TEAM?

Capstone is learning in action. Part of the core curriculum of the Masters program at NYU Wagner, it provides students with both a critical learning experience and an opportunity to perform a public service. Over the course of an academic year, students work in teams - either to address challenges and identify opportunities for a client organization or to conduct research on a pressing social question. Ultimately, Capstone contributes not only to the students' education, but also to the public good.

Capstone Teams are comprised of 3-5 NYU Wagner graduate students completing the last two semesters of their Master of Public Administration degree or their Master of Urban Planning degree. Students come to NYU Wagner with a wide variety of professional and educational backgrounds: They are seasoned professionals with years of public service behind them, recent college graduates committed to bettering the future, and mid-career professionals who want to advance or shift their career paths. Yet for all their differences, they are united by the common desire to acquire the skills necessary to transform their personal commitment into public leadership.

WHAT IS THE PROGRAM TIMELINE?

- **March 2011:** RFP process begins. All agencies interested in a Capstone project must submit a written Capstone proposal that follows the application guidelines.
- **May 27 2011:** Deadline for proposal submission.
- **June 2011:** Proposals are vetted and distributed to Capstone faculty for review.
- **June-July 2011:** Faculty reaches out to prospective clients for clarification on the scope of projects and then select projects that will be presented to their classes.
- **End of July 2011:** Prospective clients are notified if their proposals have been chosen to move on to the next phase of the selection process.
- **September 2011:** Capstone projects are presented to students in their classes, and the students choose which projects they are interested in working on. Clients are notified whether their projects have been chosen or not.
- **October 2011:** Meeting for all Capstone clients.
- **April 2012:** Capstone projects conclude.
- **May 2012:** Capstone Expo.

HOW DOES MY ORGANIZATION APPLY FOR A CAPSTONE TEAM?

You must complete and submit a project proposal for consideration. Please see pages 9 – 10 of this document for proposal guidelines.

WHEN ARE THE PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE?

For the 2011 – 2012 academic year, project proposals are due May 27, 2011.

WHAT CAN MY ORGANIZATION EXPECT FROM A CAPSTONE TEAM? WHAT WILL A CAPSTONE TEAM EXPECT OF MY ORGANIZATION?

Given that Capstone teams are not employees, interns, or independent contractors of a Capstone client organization, all teams will develop and negotiate a scope of work agreement with their client once their proposal has been selected. Project teams will use their best efforts to perform the services described in the work plan and will inform the client of any potential problems which would change the scope of services. Client agencies agree to provide the assistance and access to information necessary for the Capstone Project team to perform effectively.

Organizations should also read our Mutual Expectations document (page 8), which explains the roles and expectations of the various project stakeholders - clients, students, faculty, and NYU Wagner - that are understood during a Capstone project.

IS THERE A FEE ASSOCIATED WITH ENGAGING A CAPSTONE TEAM?

An engagement fee paid to NYU Wagner is suggested for chosen projects. This fee is based on the following sliding scale:

Engagement Fee Sliding Scale Table	
Organization’s Annual Operating Budget	Capstone Fee *
Less than \$500,000	\$500
\$500,000 - \$1,000,000	\$1,000
\$1,000,000 - \$2,500,000	\$2,500
More than \$2,500,000	\$5,000
Private Sector Agency	\$15,000

* NYU Wagner recognizes that there will be organizations for which this fee may be prohibitive. In these cases, the fee will be adjusted, and sometimes waived, to reflect the resources available to each agency. Wagner will also consider the provision of travel and accommodations for a Capstone Team in lieu of the engagement fee by internationally-based or domestic Capstone clients outside of the Northeast corridor. All proposals are reviewed on a needs-blind basis, and an organization's ability to pay an engagement fee will in no way influence the decision to approve a project.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD CAPSTONE PROJECT?

The best Capstone proposals are important but not urgent; achievable within the academic timeframe and with the resources available; provide a clear definition of the problem or issue to be addressed; and specify tangible deliverables for the Capstone team to provide. Proposals that generally do not make it past the first cut are those that ask for interns, a team of one or two students, administrative support work, or agencies without the capacity to appropriately support the Capstone team’s efforts.

WHAT IS THE PROJECT PROPOSAL SELECTION PROCESS?

Submitted proposals are first vetted for appropriateness and feasibility. Approved proposals are distributed to the Capstone faculty for review, who may contact prospective clients for clarification on the scope of projects. The faculty will then select projects that will be presented to their classes where the students choose which projects they are interested in working on. Clients are then notified whether their projects have been chosen by a Capstone Team.

IF MY ORGANIZATION APPLIES FOR A CAPSTONE TEAM, ARE WE CERTAIN TO GET ONE?

We receive more proposals than we have student teams. As a result, there is no guarantee that a proposal will be chosen. However, some projects that have not been chosen for Capstone have been downsized and "chunked" in order to be converted into internship opportunities for Wagner students.

WHAT IS A PROJECT LIAISON? HOW MUCH TIME SHOULD A PROJECT LIAISON EXPECT TO PUT TOWARDS A CAPSTONE TEAM?

All Capstone clients must designate one person in their agency who will act as the project liaison. Project liaisons are expected to act as the main organizational contact to the Capstone Team and to respond to the Capstone Team as appropriate. The time that a project liaison will devote to the project will depend on the size and scope of the Capstone project as agreed to by both the organization and team.

IF MY PROJECT PROPOSAL IS ACCEPTED, WHAT FORMAL CAPSTONE CLIENT ACTIVITIES SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT?

Capstone clients will have the opportunity to attend a Capstone opening breakfast and an End Event. As part of the End Event Exhibition, each Capstone Team will be required to write an abstract and create a visual presentation that describes the project's purpose, methodology, key insights and recommendations.

WHO OWNS THE WORK PRODUCED BY THE CAPSTONE TEAM?

The final work product is owned by the Capstone client organization. However, NYU Wagner reserves the right to publicly list the organization as a client, to keep copies of all Capstone teams' final reports for review by the Wagner community, and to include a brief project description in Capstone promotional materials. Furthermore, students will be allowed to use the work produced for their Capstone client in pursuit of their educational or professional careers.

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE ANY OTHER QUESTIONS?

Should you have any additional questions about the Capstone Program, please contact David Schachter, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, at 212.998.7475 or at david.schachter@nyu.edu.

MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS

Capstone grows out of, and contributes to, a set of interlocking communities. Communities are sustained by mutual ties of responsibility and obligation, gift and receipt. So is Capstone. Capstone has four stakeholder groups, groups that come together to make Capstone work: clients, students, faculty and Wagner itself, as represented by its administration and the Capstone program staff. Each of these groups has interwoven responsibilities to the others; each group gives to the other groups and receives in return.

Students Offer

- Energy, time and engagement
- A range of experience and expertise
- A stance of curiosity and openness to their client, their faculty and each other
- A recognition that real world projects can be messy and unpredictable, and, therefore, a willingness to re-negotiate and revise the project as necessary
- A finished work product which advances the mission of a client organization

Faculty Offer

- A learning environment, both challenging and supportive, in which students can build on earlier experiences, while trying out new ways of thinking and acting
- A set of class meetings, activities and assignments which give students an overall framework within which to work, but is adaptable to the particular needs of their projects
- Intellectual and technical expertise and experience
- Support to the client and its Capstone Team, as necessary, to ensure that the project is moving forward to a successful conclusion
- A willingness to act as liaison, as necessary, between Wagner, the client and the students
- An opportunity, towards the end of the course, for students to reflect on the bigger picture within which their project is located
- Useful feedback during and at the end of the project in addition to a final grade

Clients Offer

- A concrete, feasible project
- An identified staff liaison with the Capstone Team
- Communication with and support of its Capstone Team; an openness to mentoring team members, as well as treating them as work partners
- A willingness to re-negotiate and revise the project as necessary
- Useful feedback during the project and evaluation at the end of the project that can inform the faculty member's grading decision
- An engagement fee, where possible

Wagner and Capstone Program Staff Offer

- An academic environment with a set of supports, including specialization requirements and related courses, which contribute to Capstone's success
- Smooth-running program administration
- A clear and transparent Capstone process
- A variety of resources and support to clients, faculty and student teams
- Openness of feedback from other stakeholders on what's working and not working

We offer this list of mutual expectations in order to give all stakeholders a general sense of their obligations to others as well as others' obligations to them. Once teams have been matched with clients, we suggest that more specific work agreements be drawn up so that mutual responsibilities are made transparent and explicit.

2011-2012 CAPSTONE PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Please single-space your proposal, number all pages, and keep the proposal to no more than four (4) pages in length.
2. Respond to all requested 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. Review all of the Capstone **Frequently Asked Questions**, including the **Capstone Engagement Fee Structure Table** on Page 6, **Who Owns the Work Produced by the Capstone Team** on page 7, and the **Mutual Expectations** document on Page 8.
6. Email complete proposals to David Schachter at david.schachter@nyu.edu by May 27, 2011. Please 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 | F. Project Liaison Name |
| B. Organization Name | G. Project Liaison Title |
| C. Organization Address | H. Project Liaison Phone |
| D. Organization Website | I. Project Liaison Fax |
| E. Organization’s Annual Operating Budget | J. Project Liaison Email |

II. Include the Following Statement to Indicate That You Have Read and Understood the Proposal Guidelines

I have read and understood the Capstone proposal guidelines in full, including all of the frequently asked questions and mutual expectations, and agree to abide them.

III. Proposal Abstract (50-75 words)

Describe the key points of your proposal.

IV. 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. Finance | E. Management |
| B. Health | F. Nonprofit |
| C. Government | G. Policy |
| D. International | H. Urban Planning |

Page 2:

V. 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.

Page 3:

VI. 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, perform financial analysis, etc.).
- 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 organization's issue area, etc.)

Page 4:

VII. Desired Outcomes (½ 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 and procedures, resource lists, analysis of large datasets, a comprehensive report, recommendations on how to proceed, etc.).

VIII. Special Considerations (½ page)

If applicable, please describe any special considerations that NYU Wagner and/or the Capstone Project Team should be aware. 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. (Many Wagner students work full-time and may have constraints on their daytime availability).
- C. Whether the Capstone Team will have access to private data that may present obstacles for progress on the project, and how/when you plan to have approval for the Capstone team to proceed with gathering information 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 Program, please contact: David Schachter, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, at david.schachter@nyu.edu or at 212.998.7475. You may also refer to the Capstone website at www.wagner.nyu.edu/capstone.