The Health Behavior Capstone Course

Capstone (HBEH 746/992) is a year-long, community-led, group-based, mentored service-learning course that gives students an opportunity to apply Health Behavior (HB) MPH knowledge and skills to community-identified public health projects in partnership with local organizations. As the culminating experience of the HB MPH program, the products produced for this course serve as a substitute for The Graduate School’s master’s thesis requirement. We expect this critical learning experience to increase students’ and our partner organizations’ capacity to address public health problems and promote health equity; result in new or improved public health programs, services, and resources; enhance student marketability; and strengthen campus-community partnerships. Overall, Capstone strives to improve public health practice.

Capstone Project Work

Our partner organizations define the scope of the Capstone project work. This approach prioritizes their specific needs and gives our students an opportunity to do applied public health work on a range of topics in a variety of settings with diverse populations. Over an entire academic year (August-April), each team of four to six MPH students works with a partner organization and its stakeholders to produce a set of deliverables (i.e., tangible products) that address one overarching goal and enhance the partner organization’s mission. A preceptor (i.e., on-site mentor) outlines and supervises the project work. Each team is assigned a HB faculty adviser who provides technical expertise. The Capstone teaching team (i.e., course instructor and teaching assistants) oversees all Capstone projects and provides structures, guidance, and support to increase the effectiveness of the Capstone experience. The figure below illustrates the planned project work and its intended results.
Capstone Class Sessions

Capstone class sessions are an opportunity for students to work on, reflect on, receive feedback about, and present their Capstone projects. Most class sessions are protected time for teams to work on their projects and receive support from the teaching team. Once a month, all Capstone students, the teaching team, and various guests gather during class to discuss the means by which structural bias, social inequities, and racism undermine health and create challenges to achieving health equity at organizational, community, and societal levels including within Capstone; cross-share about the Capstone project work; disseminate best practices; and problem solve across teams.

Frequently Asked Questions

What types of organizations can host a Capstone team?

Governmental, non-governmental, non-profit, industrial, for-profit, and university-affiliated organizations are all appropriate. University-affiliated organizations must focus on community engagement, typically with external partners. In order to be eligible to host a Capstone team, organizations must:

1. Be doing work that addresses a public health issue.
2. Have staff with the time (two-four hours per week), expertise, and interest to mentor a team of four to six students.
3. Have organizational capacity and resources to sustain support for a Capstone project over the 2019-2020 academic year.

We prioritize organizations whose work promotes health equity, allows for meaningful engagement with intended beneficiaries, and occurs within a one-hour drive of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Over the past ten years, we’ve worked with fifty-nine Capstone partner organizations including:

- Alexander YMCA
- American Social Health Association
- Amigas Latinas Motivando el Alma
- The Art Therapy Institute
- Birth Partners UNC Medical Center Volunteer Doula Service
- Boys on Track
- Campus & Community Coalition to Reduce the Negative Impacts of High Risk Drinking, Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership
- Carolina Campus Community Garden
- Center for Community Self-Help and Self-Help Credit Union
- Cervical Cancer-Free NC
- Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools
- Chatham County Council on Aging
- Chatham County Public Health Department
- Chatham Habitat for Humanity
- Children’s Home Society of North Carolina
- Community Backyard
- Community Transformation Grant
- Counter Tobacco
- Duke University Substance Abuse & Health Promotion Center
- Durham County Department of Public Health
- El Pueblo, Inc.
- Food Insight Group
- Frank Porter Graham Bilingüe
- InterFaith Food Shuttle
- IntraHealth, Inc.
- Mountain Area Health Education Center
- NC BEAUTY Research Project
- NC Cancer Hospital Comprehensive Cancer Support Program
- NC Division of Public Health, Injury and Violence Prevention Branch
- NC Division of Public Health, Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch
- NC Falls Prevention Coalition
- NC Latina BEAUTY
- North Carolina Central University Women’s Center
- North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- North Carolina Comprehensive Cancer Program
- North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition
- Orange County Department on Aging
- Orange County Emergency Medicine Services
- Orange County Health Department
- Orange County Rape Crisis Center
- Orange County Solid Waste Management
- Planned Parenthood of Central North Carolina
- PORCH, Inc.
What are the roles and responsibilities of a preceptor?

Preceptors outline and supervise the Capstone project work. They should expect to spend two to four hours per week, on average, guiding the Capstone project work. Preceptor responsibilities include:

- Establishing an appropriate and feasible scope of work that is directly aligned with the partner organization’s needs and provides a valuable learning experience for students
- Orienting students to the health topic(s), people, policies, procedures, and norms related to the Capstone project work
- Maintaining regular contact with the student team through meetings (typically every other week) and email
- Providing continuous direction and specific, timely feedback on the Capstone project work based on the objectives of the project and needs of the organization
- Helping the team to problem-solve
- Modeling professional, ethical behavior
- Attending an orientation (late August), a spring check-in meeting (January), and their team’s final presentation (early May)
- Identifying a suitable replacement if unable to continue in the role of a preceptor

What are the roles and responsibilities of the student team?

Each Capstone student is expected to spend approximately nine hours per week working on Capstone, including both class and project work. Students are responsible for:

- Applying the knowledge and skills gained through their HB MPH training to the Capstone project work
- Following the steps and taking a participatory approach to producing the work outlined in the Capstone project work plan
- Managing all internal processes associated with the Capstone project work including equitable distribution of work, decision making, conflict management, etc.
- Keeping all mentors informed of support needed, decisions, and progress on the Capstone project work
- Responding to mentor feedback
- Producing high-quality work that is useful to the Capstone partner organization and its stakeholders
- Maintaining professional and ethical behavior
- Being familiar with Capstone policies and procedures

Students should not be expected to be “extra” or replacement staff or research assistants, nor are they to provide purely administrative support.
What are the roles and responsibilities of the faculty adviser?

Each team receives support from a faculty adviser whose responsibilities are to:
- Ensure that students’ work meets the level of quality expected for a master's thesis substitute
- Provide technical expertise
- Respond to student inquiries and direct students to resources
- Provide specific, timely feedback to students about their quality of work and professionalism
- Attend an orientation (late August), a spring check-in meeting (January), and their team’s final presentation (early May)

What are the roles and responsibilities of the teaching team?

A course instructor and two teaching assistants oversee the Capstone program. The teaching team’s responsibilities are to:
- Communicate expectations for the Capstone program
- Provide guidance on Capstone processes and project work
- Manage student, preceptor, and faculty adviser interests and priorities
- Facilitate feedback and problem solve among Capstone parties
- Promote consistency across the Capstone projects’ depth, scope, and quality

What conditions promote Capstone project success?

Capstone projects are most successful for organizations when:
- There is an immediate need and use for the deliverables produced
- The work is informed by and is responsive to project stakeholders, including the project’s intended beneficiaries
- Leadership at the Capstone partner organization fully supports the Capstone project and provides the resources necessary to carry out the project work

Capstone projects are most successful for students when:
- The project work allows students to apply and develop a wide range of skills that will enhance their growth as public health practitioners
- Deliverables have clear purposes, are interrelated, and serve the overall project goal
- The preceptor is invested in the benefits to the organization and the students and has dedicated time, expertise, and interest to mentor graduate students
- There is ample time and attention given to orienting students to the project work, partner organization, and key stakeholders, including the project’s intended beneficiaries
- Students have an opportunity to interact with the intended beneficiaries of the project work
What types of deliverables can Capstone teams produce?

Each Capstone team typically produces four to six major deliverables. Examples include:

- Assessment Tools
- Community Assessment Reports
- Curricula
- Dissemination Plans
- Evaluation Plans
- Evaluation Tools
- Evidence Tables
- Focus Group Guides
- Formative Research Findings Reports
- Funding Guides
- Grant Proposals
- Health Communication Campaign Materials
- Health Communication Plans
- Intervention Materials
- Interview Guides
- IRB Applications
- Literature Reviews
- Manuscripts
- Message Testing Reports
- Photovoice Projects
- Policies and Procedures Manuals
- Policy Briefs
- Policy Recommendations
- Presentation Materials
- Program Plans
- Sustainability Plans
- Training Workshop Materials
- Video Storyboards

Can a Capstone team do global work?

Capstone teams can work with agencies that do global public health work; however, HB does not have the resources to support international travel as part of their Capstone project work. Moreover, our academic structure does not lend itself well to extended international travel that results in absence from classes.

Is there a fee associated with engaging a Capstone team?

No. HB does not charge for the services its students, faculty, and staff provide during this mentored field experience. Annually, our Capstone students provide approximately $255,000 of in-kind service\(^1\) to our partner organizations.

If my organization applies for a Capstone team, are we certain to get one?

Given the varied interests and expertise of our students, there is no guarantee that a proposal will be selected in any given year. If your project is not selected, either at the proposal review stage or through student rankings, you may be encouraged to apply in a future year or to reconsider the scope of your project proposal to take advantage of other field training opportunities in HB (e.g., the practicum).

\(^1\) Calculation based on: 45 students/year x 9 hours of Capstone work/week/student x 30 weeks/year x $20.96 (graduate assistant hourly rate) = $254,664.
Logistics

How to Apply

To apply for a Capstone team, please follow this process:

1. Review this document.
2. Schedule a phone call or face-to-face meeting with Meg Landfried (landfried@unc.edu; 919-966-0057), Capstone course instructor, that will take place by January 28, 2019 to discuss your ideas for a Capstone project.
4. Collect a letter of support from your organization’s leadership. The letter of support should explain how the Capstone project goal will enhance your organization’s mission; demonstrate commitment to the resources and support (including staff time) needed to carry out the project work; and outline a contingency plan if the preceptor is no longer able to carry out the roles and responsibilities of that position.
5. Email your completed proposal form and a letter of support to Meg Landfried (landfried@unc.edu) by 11:59 p.m. on February 4, 2019.

Project Selection

Submitted proposals are reviewed by a committee of faculty and current Capstone students. Proposals are scored based on the following criteria:

- **Project Clarity**: The proposed deliverables have clear purposes and steps, are interrelated, and connect to the overall project goal.
- **Project Feasibility**: The breadth and depth of deliverables and proposed timeline is appropriate for four to six students to produce over two academic semesters (August-April while classes are in session). The proposal accounts for the time and effort needed to onboard students. Key stakeholders are located within an hour’s drive of Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
- **Learning Opportunities**: The project will facilitate acquisition of knowledge and skills that will enhance students’ growth as public health practitioners.
- **Mentorship**: The preceptor has the time (approximately four hours per week), expertise, and interest needed to mentor MPH students.
- **Organizational Capacity**: The partner organization has capacity and funding to sustain support for a Capstone project over the 2019-2020 academic year. Leadership at the Capstone partner organization demonstrates full support of the Capstone project. Sustainability and contingency plans are clear and feasible.
- **Approach**: The Capstone partner organization demonstrates values of equity, inclusivity, and diversity in their approach to addressing public health problems. The project work is designed to be equitable and sustainable.
- **Engagement**: The project work is informed by and responsive to project stakeholders including its intended beneficiaries. Students will have an opportunity to interact with the intended beneficiaries of the project work.
- **Public Health Impact**: The project has strong potential to make a meaningful difference in the health of the beneficiary population(s).
We will invite preceptors whose proposals receive the highest scores to give a brief (~5 minute) presentation about their project ideas to students at Capstone Pitch Day (12:30-3:30 p.m. on March 1, 2019). After Capstone Pitch Day, students rank their top five choices for Capstone projects. The Capstone teaching team then conducts a matching process among the projects, students, and faculty advisers. Prospective organizations will be notified whether their projects have been selected to receive a Capstone Team in early April.

### Timeline

The Capstone solicitation, selection, and matching process will occur between December 2018 and April 2019. Capstone teams (students, preceptor, faculty adviser) are expected to meet with the teaching team once before the 2019 summer break to outline a work plan. Capstone project work will officially begin in September 2019 and will continue while classes are in session until April 2020. The Capstone project work will culminate with final presentations in early May 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 2018-January 2019</td>
<td>Solicit potential Capstone projects</td>
<td>Capstone Teaching Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>January-early February 2019</td>
<td>Collect Capstone project proposals</td>
<td>Capstone Teaching Team</td>
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<td>January-February 2019</td>
<td>Review and rank Capstone project proposals</td>
<td>Capstone Project Selection Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2019</td>
<td>Select projects to be “pitched” to students in March</td>
<td>Capstone Project Selection Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 1, 2019 from 12:30-3:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Present project proposal at Capstone Pitch Day</td>
<td>Selected Preceptors</td>
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<td>March 2019</td>
<td>Rank top 5 choices for Capstone projects</td>
<td>Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2019</td>
<td>Facilitate matching process between students, Capstone projects, and faculty advisers</td>
<td>Capstone Teaching Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>By April 1, 2019</td>
<td>Announce 2019-2020 Capstone projects, preceptors, student teams, and faculty advisers</td>
<td>Capstone Teaching Team</td>
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<td>May 2019</td>
<td>Initial Capstone team meetings</td>
<td>Students, Preceptors, Faculty Advisers</td>
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<td>June 3, 2019</td>
<td>Submit signed draft work plan</td>
<td>Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late August 2019</td>
<td>Attend Capstone Orientation</td>
<td>Students, Preceptors, Faculty Advisers</td>
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<td>Late August/early September 2019</td>
<td>Orient students to Capstone partner organization</td>
<td>Preceptors</td>
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<td>September 2019</td>
<td>Finalize fall work plan</td>
<td>Students, Preceptors, Faculty Advisers</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2020</td>
<td>Update work plan</td>
<td>Students, Preceptors, Faculty Advisers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late April 2020</td>
<td>Turn in completed deliverables</td>
<td>Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early May 2020</td>
<td>Present results and impact of Capstone work</td>
<td>Students, Preceptors, Faculty Advisers</td>
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### Contact Us

For more information, please contact Meg Landfried (landfried@unc.edu; 919-966-0057).