

Capstone Overview

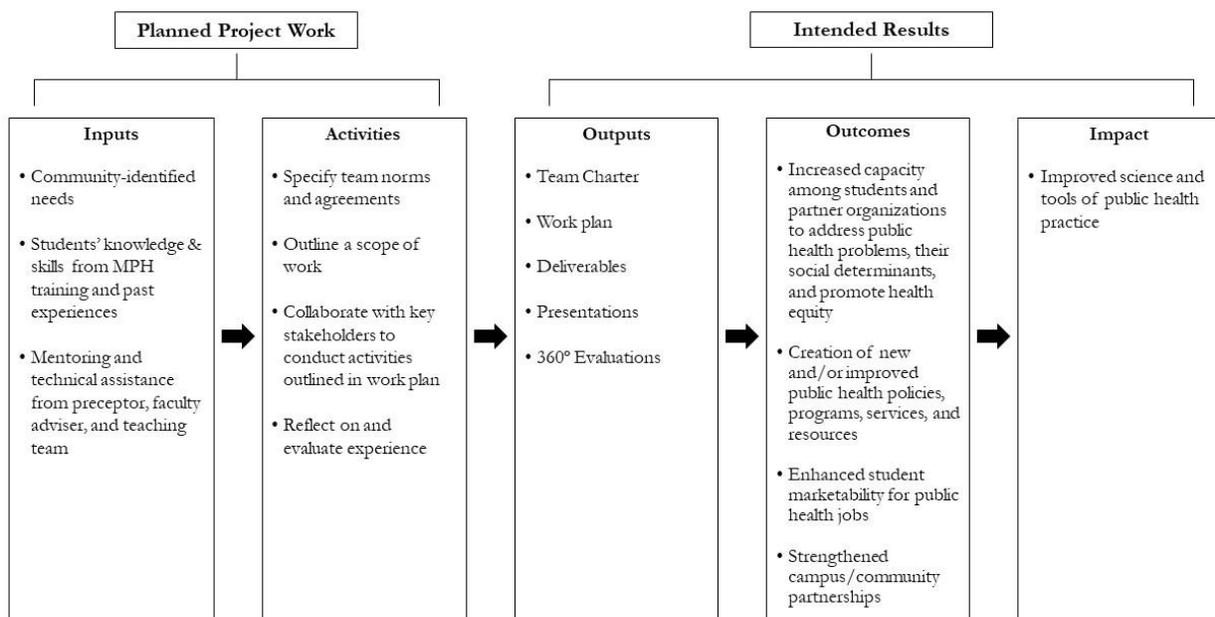
UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health

Capstone Course

Capstone (HBEH 746/992) is a year-long, community-led, group-based, mentored service-learning course that gives students in the Health Behavior (HB) and Health Equity, Social Justice, and Human Rights (EQUITY) Gillings MPH concentrations an opportunity to apply MPH knowledge and skills to public health projects in partnership with community-based organizations. As the culminating experience for the HB and EQUITY MPH programs, the products produced for this course serve as a substitute for The Graduate School's master's thesis requirement. Capstone class sessions (Wednesdays from 1:25-4:25 p.m.) 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 to cross-share about the Capstone project work, disseminate best practices, and problem solve across teams.

Capstone Project Work

We expect this critical learning experience to increase students' and our partner organizations' capacity to address public health problems, their social determinants, and promote health equity; result in new or improved public health policies, programs, services, and resources; enhance student marketability; and strengthen campus-community partnerships. Overall, Capstone strives to improve the science and tools of public health practice. The figure below illustrates the planned project work and its intended results. Our partner organizations define the scope of work for the Capstone projects. 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., organizational contact, supervisor, and mentor to the student team) outlines and supervises the project work. Each team is supported by a 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 supports to increase the effectiveness of the Capstone experience.



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. 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 (**2-4 hours per week**), expertise, and interest to mentor a team of 4-6 students.
3. Have organizational capacity and resources to sustain support for a Capstone project over the 2021-2022 academic year.

We prioritize organizations with demonstrated commitment to equity, inclusion, and social justice whose work allows for meaningful engagement with intended beneficiaries. Over the past twelve years, we have worked with seventy-one Capstone partner organizations including:

Alexander YMCA	NC BEAUTY Research Project
American Social Health Association	NC Cancer Hospital Comprehensive Cancer Support Program
Amigas Latinas Motivando el Alma	NC Division of Public Health, Injury and Violence Prevention Branch
The Art Therapy Institute	NC Division of Public Health, Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch
Birth Partners UNC Medical Center Volunteer Doula Service	NC Falls Prevention Coalition
Boys on Track	NC Latina BEAUTY
Campus & Community Coalition to Reduce the Negative Impacts of High Risk Drinking, Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership	NC Poverty Research Fund
Carolina Campus Community Garden	North Carolina Central University Women's Center
Center for Community Self-Help and Self-Help Credit Union	North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Cervical Cancer-Free NC	North Carolina Comprehensive Cancer Program
Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools	North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition
Chatham County Council on Aging	Orange County Department on Aging
Chatham County Public Health Department	Orange County Emergency Medicine Services
Chatham Habitat for Humanity	Orange County Health Department
Children's Home Society of North Carolina	Orange County Rape Crisis Center
Community Backyard	Orange County Solid Waste Management
Community Transformation Grant	Planned Parenthood of Central North Carolina
Counter Tobacco	PORCH, Inc.
Duke Child and Adolescent Gender Care Clinic	PREVENT Research Project
Duke University Substance Abuse & Health Promotion Center	Project IFE Research Project
Durham County Department of Public Health	Project ImPACT Research Project
El Pueblo, Inc.	Research Triangle Institute Center for Communication Science
Food Insight Group	Rural Opportunity Institute
Frank Porter Graham Bilingüe	Sexual Health Initiatives for Teens (SHIFT) NC
Granville Vance Public Health	Southeast Raleigh YMCA
Healthy Alamance	Southern Oral History Program
InterFaith Food Shuttle	SpiritHouse, Inc.
IntraHealth, Inc.	State Trauma Advisory Council
Mountain Area Health Education Center	TABLE-PORCH-IFC
National Implementation Research Network	

Toxic Free, NC
UCLA Art and Global Health Center
UNC Center for Environmental Health and
Susceptibility
UNC Community Campus Partnership
UNC Counseling and Wellness Services
UNC Department of Surgery

UNC Division of General Internal Medicine
UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center
UNC Family Medicine
UNC Trauma Program
UNC Worksite Wellness
United Way of NC

What are the roles and responsibilities of a preceptor?

A preceptor is the organizational contact, supervisor, and mentor to the student team. They outline and supervise the Capstone project work. They should expect to spend **2-4 hours per week**, on average, guiding the Capstone project work. Preceptors are responsible for:

- Establishing a clear vision for the project and 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 public health issues, people, policies, procedures, and norms related to the Capstone project work. This includes providing a guided tour of community(ies) the Capstone partner organization works with and introducing students to key informants and potential stakeholders
- 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 initial team meeting (April/May 2021) orientation (August/September 2021), a spring check-in meeting (January 2022), and their team's final presentation (April/May 2022)
- 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 **9 hours per week** working on Capstone, including both class and project work. Students are responsible for:

- Applying the knowledge and skills gained through their 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 particularly through weekly emailed updates to preceptor(s), faculty adviser, and the teaching team
- 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 technical assistance from a faculty adviser who is responsible for:

- Maintaining regular contact and communication with the Capstone team by at a minimum responding as needed to weekly updates and meeting with team ~3 times per semester
- Providing specific, timely feedback to students about their quality of work and performance
- Ensuring that students' work meets the level of quality expected for a master's thesis substitute
- Grading Capstone deliverables and assessing students' demonstration of competency attainment
- Attending an initial team meeting (April/May 2021) orientation (August/September 2021), a spring check-in meeting (January 2022), and their team's final presentation (April/May 2022)

What are the roles and responsibilities of the teaching team?

A course instructor and two teaching assistants oversee the Capstone program. The teaching team is responsible for:

- Communicating expectations for the Capstone program
- Providing guidance on Capstone processes and project work
- Managing stakeholder (e.g., students, preceptors, faculty advisers, accreditors) interests and priorities
- Facilitating feedback and problem solving among Capstone parties
- Promoting consistency across the Capstone projects' depth, scope, and quality

What conditions promote Capstone project success?

Capstone projects are most successful for **organizations** when:

- The organization has a clear vision for the project work
- There is an immediate need and use for the deliverables produced
- The work is informed by and is responsive to project stakeholders, including those most impacted by the project topic
- Leadership at the Capstone partner organization fully supports the Capstone project and provides the resources (including staff time) 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 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 populations most impacted by 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, Gillings does not have the resources to support international travel as part of 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. There is no charge for the services Gillings students, faculty, and staff provide during this mentored field experience. Annually, our Capstone students provide approximately \$255,000 of in-kind service¹ 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. 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 such as 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 the Capstone Overview document in full.
2. Contact mphcapstone@unc.edu to schedule a meeting with a member of the Capstone teaching team to discuss your project ideas and receive tips on the Capstone project proposal process. **Meetings with the teaching team should take place by January 25, 2021.**
3. Fill out the 2021-2022 Capstone Project Proposal Form, available [here](#). Please save your completed proposal as a **Microsoft Word** document using the following naming convention: Organization Name_Capstone Proposal 2021-2022.
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 mphcapstone@unc.edu by 11:59 p.m. on **February 1, 2021.**

Project Selection

Submitted proposals are reviewed by a committee of faculty and current 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 4-6 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.
- **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 4 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 2021-2022 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 commitment to equity, inclusion, and social justice 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 those most directly impacted by the issue. 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 communities and 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 (TBD March, 2021). 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 2020 and April 2021. Capstone teams (students, preceptor, faculty adviser) are expected to meet with the teaching team once before the 2021 summer break to draft a team charter and outline a work plan. Capstone project work will officially begin in August 2021 and will continue while classes are in session until April 2022. The Capstone project work will culminate with final presentations in late April 2022.

Date	Task	Who's Responsible
December 2020-January 2021	Solicit potential Capstone projects	Capstone Teaching Team
January-early February 2021	Collect Capstone project proposals	Capstone Teaching Team
January-February 2020	Review and rank Capstone project proposals	Capstone Project Selection Committee
February 2021	Select projects to be “pitched” to students in March	Capstone Project Selection Committee
TBD March 2021	Present project proposal at Capstone Pitch Day	Selected Preceptors
March 2021	Rank top 5 choices for Capstone projects	Students
March 2021	Facilitate matching process between students, Capstone projects, and faculty advisers	Capstone Teaching Team
By April 3, 2021	Announce 2020-2021 Capstone projects, preceptors, student teams, and faculty advisers	Capstone Teaching Team
April/May 2021	Conduct initial Capstone team meetings	Students, Preceptors, Faculty Advisers, Capstone Teaching Team
June 1, 2021	Submit signed draft work plan	Students
Late August 2021	Attend Capstone Orientation	Students, Preceptors, Faculty Advisers
Late August/early September 2021	Orient students to Capstone partner organization	Preceptors
September 2021	Finalize fall work plan	Students, Preceptors, Faculty Advisers
January 2022	Attend spring check-in meetings	Students, Preceptors, Faculty Advisers, Capstone Teaching Team
January 2022	Update work plan	Students, Preceptors, Faculty Advisers
Late April 2022	Turn in completed deliverables	Students
Early May 2022	Present results and impact of Capstone work	Students, Preceptors, Faculty Advisers

Contact Us

For more information, please contact mphcapstone@unc.edu.