

**UCLA** Luskin School *of* Public Affairs

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Department of Social Welfare

**MSW Research Capstone Handbook**

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## Introduction

In social work, professionals need to understand and apply research findings and be able to carry out evaluation and related research activities. Research is a systematic set of activities that help develop an evidence-based frame of reference for decision-making, problem solving, and evaluation in practice and program settings. Social work research can help us better understand social problems, assess community and client needs, and develop and test solutions to society's most pressing issues.

At UCLA, we believe in the power of research to inform the field of social work. Our research-rich environment, five-quarter research course sequence, and applied training through the Research Capstone project offers students a unique learning opportunity. As we know, evidence-based practices are increasingly important in social work, and our curriculum equips MSWs with skills to be change agents in the field. This Research Capstone allows students to bring together content and practice knowledge from their area of concentration, theory, methods, and science through a hands-on, applied research project.

This handbook is a living document that may be updated regularly. The latest version will always be available to download from the website. This is the best starting place to be informed about policies and guidelines related to the MSW Research Capstone.

## Timeline for Second Year Capstone Project

### Summary of Key Milestones

For specific dates for your cohort, consult the 260ABC syllabi.

Individual Project Proposals: <i>Due End of Spring Quarter of First Year</i>
Register Capstone Group: <i>Mid-September (Prior to Fall Quarter)</i>
Submit Completed Capstone Project: <i>May of Spring Quarter Second Year</i>
Pass / No-pass Decisions from Faculty Distributed: <i>Two Weeks after Submission Date</i>
Revisions (if applicable): <i>Two Weeks after Receipt of Feedback</i>
End of Year Celebration: <i>End of Spring Quarter</i>

Time	Task
Spring of 1 <sup>st</sup> Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend Capstone Information Session</li> <li>• Begin exploring topics for Capstone</li> <li>• Start identifying potential group members</li> <li>• Submit proposal for individual project (if applicable)</li> </ul>
Summer after 1 <sup>st</sup> Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solidify group members OR begin individual project with mentor</li> <li>• Review literature on topic of interest</li> </ul>
Fall of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend Capstone Orientation Session</li> <li>• Review literature</li> <li>• Formulate research questions of interest</li> <li>• Identify data source</li> <li>• Complete IRB (if applicable)</li> <li>• Design study</li> <li>• Attend all class meetings</li> <li>• Meet as a group with instructor weekly</li> <li>• Complete research proposal</li> </ul>
Winter of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect data (if applicable)</li> <li>• Clean data</li> <li>• Analyze data</li> <li>• Attend all workshops</li> <li>• Regularly meet with instructor</li> </ul>
Spring of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write up results</li> <li>• Formulate presentation of results (e.g., tables, figures)</li> <li>• Interpret results</li> <li>• Discuss how results apply</li> <li>• Regularly meet with instructor</li> <li>• Complete full capstone project in mid-May</li> <li>• Pass/No-pass decisions from faculty shared by end of May</li> <li>• Revisions due mid-June</li> <li>• Share findings at end of year celebration</li> </ul>

## Required Second Year Courses and Capstone Meetings

It is expected that students will be available during class time every week throughout the entire year. If there are no required or structured meetings, students should plan to be working on their capstone projects during class time. Students should not enroll for another class, take a job, or set up any other regular appointments that conflict with the capstone course time.

### **Capstone Spring Information Session** (First Year, Spring) – 3 hours

This session overviews Capstone guidelines and expectations, provide guidance on forming groups for the Capstone, and review requirements for individual project proposals.

### **Capstone Orientation Session** (Second Year, September, prior to Fall quarter) – 2 hours

This session will follow the second-year field orientation session, when students are already on campus. The session will focus on finalizing group membership for the Capstone projects, facilitating groups' efforts to complete their Capstone project registration forms, and holding a Q&A session about the Capstone.

### **260A: Research Capstone I: Project Development** (Second Year, Fall) – 4 units

Students learn to formulate research problems, questions, and hypotheses that guide a critical review of literature and illuminate current understanding of their area of interest. Working in groups of three to four, students develop a proposal for a research capstone project that includes a literature review and a plan for collecting data or using existing data to address an applied problem relevant to social welfare. This course will include required course lectures, meetings, or workshops, as noted in the syllabus, balanced with open time during the quarter to complete the project. Students complete a proposal for the research capstone project, a work plan, and responsibilities for each research team member.

### **260B/C: Research Capstone II & III** – One In-Progress Course (Grade assigned at end of spring quarter)

#### **II Data Gathering and Analyses** (Second Year, Winter) – 2 units

This course supports students in implementing their research capstone, including data gathering and preliminary analysis. Classes meet approximately once per week during the winter quarter, but course meetings are at the discretion of each instructor. Class meetings may occur in small or large groups as the instructor sees fit to assist with trouble-shooting or in meetings led by TAs to teach specialized research skills. This course culminates in a write-up of the project methods and initial results.

#### **III: Interpreting and Disseminating Research** (Second Year, Spring) – 2 units

This course guides students in completing their research capstone. Students complete analyses, writing up of results, and interpretation of findings. Instruction will focus on grounding interpretation of results in existing literature and discussing findings for real-world applications.

The course culminates in a final paper that includes abstract, theory and literature review, methods, results, discussion, and implications for social welfare.

## Guidelines and Policies

### Project Criteria

All Capstones must meet certain quality standards. The following criteria are assessed by the faculty and must be adequately met for the Capstone to pass:

- **Knowledge-Based:** Demonstrate adequate knowledge of literature related to the problem of focus and ability to synthesize and critique existing research.
- **Data-Driven:** Use primary or secondary data, whether qualitative or quantitative, and analyze the data in a way that maps onto the research questions. Data may be collected by the researcher (e.g., interviews, surveys, observations) or gathered from an existing source (e.g., existing datasets; agency data or records); taken from a small or large sample; collected in diverse settings (e.g., agency, community, school, online).
- **Ethical:** Relevant to social work values and follows ethical guidelines for research with human subjects.
- **Rigorous:** Show rigorous assessment of the strengths and limitations of any research method when making decisions around sampling and sample size, measurement, and data collection.
- **Applied:** Link research knowledge and findings to real-world issues arising in practice, policy or research settings. Students draw implications for social welfare that are relevant to the state of the knowledge and that should include a social justice focus, such as considering how research may fail to address the needs and realities of exploited or disadvantaged communities and how research can be used to enhance equity.

These standards encourage flexibility in the types of projects that students can undertake. For example, some students may choose to collect their own data with an agency, in the community, or online. Projects in agencies could be program evaluations or studies that gain insight into particular needs or issues. Students might use secondary data, such as a publicly available dataset, historical records, mass media, or research articles obtained through a systematic search. Students could also use a faculty member's dataset. **Please visit the MSW Research Capstone website for a list of available datasets.** All projects **must** involve some data use and analysis. The Capstone professors support the project development and evaluate the project on these quality standards and must approve group projects before students can begin data collection. For individual projects, faculty mentors must approve the project after evaluating the project on these quality standards prior to data collection.

## Mentorship and Support

Instructors teaching in the 260 sequence are the primary mentors for the students in carrying out projects. After groups of three to four students have been formed, prior to the start of the fall quarter, instructors divide students into Capstone course sections based on proposed methods, areas of interest, and/or match with faculty instructors' areas of expertise.

Due to the complication of assigning students to the best-fitting Capstone course, students' requests for a particular instructor cannot be accommodated. As a general rule, changes to instructor assignments are not allowed after decisions have been made.

Students completing individual projects have a faculty mentor, and are also assigned to a Capstone course. Individual project students get additional support for their projects through course assignments and feedback from Capstone instructor and peers.

The instructor/mentor helps students identify literature, refine their questions, develop a structure for their project, and formulate an analytical approach. Mentors have a general responsibility to oversee the year-long project and provide guidance to their assigned student groups. The mentor does NOT solve problems or determine the content or methods of the project, but rather helps students solve their own problems and provides advice about how to plan, design and execute original applied research. Managing the mentor relationship is an integral part of the process: students should come to all course meetings and instructor/mentor meetings well prepared, with written materials that clearly identify problems, issues, and options about how to address them.

Graduate Special Readers (TAs) are available to provide additional support to students for the winter and spring quarters. These Readers offer a range of qualitative and quantitative expertise and can provide assistance with analyses, interpretation, and writing up results.

## Capstone Database

An additional resource for your capstone projects is the MSW Capstone Database, which appears on the UCLA Social Welfare website and offers downloadable versions of prior MSW capstones. Past projects can offer instructive examples to current students, and can be a way to outwardly showcase the research findings of MSW capstone projects. Any plagiarizing or direct copying of text or ideas from prior projects is strictly forbidden.

At the end of the spring quarter, students will be given a chance to opt-out of having their capstone project included on the website. If one group member decides to opt out, the project will not be displayed publicly. If the professor or students determine that the capstone project has content too identifying for a population or agency, the capstone will not be displayed publicly.

## Forming Groups

Working in groups is the best way to complete an effective project. Group work also mirrors the usual practice of real-world research in the field of social work. Very little research in nonprofit organizations, schools, or agencies is accomplished by individuals working in isolation. For these reasons, the Department expects that students will work in groups of **three or four**. Teams have more hours to commit to projects as well as complementary expertise and skillsets to carry out the project. At the same time, large teams can sometimes become inefficient, with students doing piecemeal work or only taking on small responsibilities. Thus, groups must be selected carefully and prioritize learning to work together effectively. From our experience, groups that have established good working relationships based on past experiences tend to function more effectively, whereas groups formed by topic alone have more challenges in learning to work together.

Students from different Areas of Concentration (AoC) can form a single group. There are many meaningful and exciting projects that could include a synergy between two or more of our areas of concentration. Ideally, students' Capstone projects will align with their AoC to allow for an integration of knowledge into an applied project, but a close alignment between a student's AoC and project is not required.

A select number of students can apply and be selected to complete an individual research project (described below). An individual project must be done by one student on their own and will entail significantly more work than working as a group. A limited number of individual project proposals will be selected. This process is competitive and follows a specific timeline. Students who miss the deadline for individual project proposals will not be eligible to complete an individual project. Not wanting to work in a group is not a sufficient reason to apply to complete an individual project.

Learning to work as a team is part of the project. Groups are expected to talk early and often about shared expectations, responsibilities, timelines, and goals. Students should strive for open communication and work to resolve any disagreements immediately as they arise. Each team member is expected to have a large and meaningful contribution to the work, and each student's contribution is discussed and negotiated at the outset and written out in a contract form. Students will be required to sign this contract or memorandum of understanding (MOU) to guide the work. MOUs will be revisited regularly throughout the year. Faculty mentors and Special Readers can be consulted to talk about team issues, but do not attempt to step in and make decisions for the team. All aspects of course assignments involve group grades, where all students in a group receive the same grade for the work.

Students should approach the selection of group members thoughtfully. Factors that make for good matches include: shared research interests, shared agency placement, compatible work styles, past experience of successful collaboration, complementary expertise (e.g., one student strong in analysis and another student strong in writing), and communication styles that involve openness and responsiveness.



All students are expected to fulfill their agreed upon roles in the group. Groups should try to negotiate and work out conflicts on their own. If issues cannot be worked out, the Capstone instructor and/or the Capstone Coordinator should be consulted.

## Registering Groups

Students are encouraged beginning in the spring of the first year to begin making group matches. All groups must be registered via completion of the online form, which will be provided on or before the Capstone Orientation prior to the fall quarter. All groups must be registered before the fall quarter of the second year. **Only ONE form should be submitted from each group.** The registration form will ask for the following information, although specific questions may be adjusted from year to year based on needs and opportunities:

- First and last names of group members.
- Tentative topic and population of study for the group's Capstone project.
- Brief rationale for forming this group, given your project description above. For example, describe the interests, skills, or qualities of group members that will be beneficial for collaborative work or field placements that will benefit the group in terms of completing the Capstone project.
- Tentative or planned study design for the project:
  - Qualitative, quantitative, not sure
  - Primary data, secondary data, not sure
- Planned data source, agency partner, or other relevant information.

Group membership is not finalized until approved by the Capstone faculty. While it is very likely that the groups will be approved as submitted, it is possible that adjustments will be made to group membership. Groups of 3 may be joined by a 4<sup>th</sup> student to ensure that all students are matched.

## Student Health Emergencies and Extenuating Circumstances

At times, students may have extenuating circumstances that lead to the need for a medical leave, time off from the program, or an incomplete grade assignment for courses. In these circumstances, the student should discuss the situation with their Capstone instructor as soon as possible. A revised course of study for the student will be determined on a case-by-case basis, but may involve repeating the Capstone course sequence in the subsequent year.

Groups where one member is unable to complete their tasks due to leave of absence or other extenuating circumstance will need to redistribute the workload and redefine the scope of the Capstone project with Capstone instructor permission and advisement.

## Stipends and Capstone Requirements

Students may have a stipend or fellowship that comes with a capstone or research requirement. When possible, students are encouraged to use their MSW capstone project to meet their stipend capstone or research requirement. For some stipends, such as UC Lend, it is currently not feasible to combine the MSW capstone and UC Lend capstone projects, because the UC Lend students are grouped with fellow stipend-holders for the capstone, some of whom are in different programs. Other stipend requirements should be considered when selecting a capstone project, such as the public child welfare stipend holders, as described below. Students with any questions about their stipend capstone requirement should speak to the director of their stipend program for more information.

### *Public Child Welfare Stipend Capstone Guidelines*

Public child welfare (PCW) students including LA DCFS and CALSWEC are a part of the stipend training program for their second year of the MSW program. The students need to choose topics for their capstone that are aligned with child welfare. Child welfare intersects with mental health, education, housing, juvenile justice, and homelessness. However, all of these topics must be related to how they impact children and families “at risk” for involvement with the child welfare system.

The students can choose to use data from LA DCFS as long as all of their group members are currently PCW students.

The topics for capstone that would also meet the requirement for child welfare are the following:

- Children and families that intersect with child welfare or have been system involved
- Youth aging out of the foster care system
- Foster parents
- Kinship care
- Racial inequity and child welfare
- Poverty and child welfare
- Mental health and how impacts children and families in child welfare
- Education and how it affects children and youth in child welfare

Although the topics are not exhaustive, the project must contain some aspect of child welfare.

## Final Evaluation of Capstone Project

The final paper from 260C is the same as the final Capstone project. This final paper will be evaluated by two senate faculty members. Each reviewer will assign one of three evaluations:

PASS = Capstone meets or exceeds all criteria.

PROVISIONAL PASS = Capstone does not meet one or more criteria but will meet them with some revisions.

NON-PASS = Capstone did not meet one or more criteria and requires substantial revisions.

The criteria are described above. Careful attention should be paid to each criterion. It is important to remember that even very strong Capstone projects may receive a provisional pass if one or more criteria are omitted or incomplete. It is not uncommon for minor revisions to be requested by reviewers.

All members of a group receive the same designation. If a Capstone project receives an evaluation other than PASS from both reviewers, the project will be returned to students for revision. If only one reviewer gives a provisional or non-pass, then a third reader reviews the Capstone project and makes the final determination regarding need for revision.

When revisions are required, the Capstone Coordinator will coordinate with all faculty reviewers to determine a specific set of revisions needed. Whether the revised paper meets the criteria will be determined by the instructor in consultation with the Capstone Coordinator. No additional revisions will be requested after the original request, and any subsequent requests for revision will focus on adequately addressing the original request for revision.

Students needing to revise their Capstone projects are encouraged to consult their Capstone instructors for advice on how to approach revisions. Students must respond to the reviews point-by-point in a cover letter and also include a revised Capstone paper with changes tracked in the document. Revisions should be completed as quickly as possible to ensure that a final decision is reached in a timely manner. The revised project will be reviewed again by one or more reviewers.

A pass on the Capstone project is required for graduation.

## Human Subjects Review

In general, class projects are not required to undergo IRB review. For the Social Welfare Research Capstone, IRB applications is generally required in only a few situations:

1. Agency or community partner requires IRB approval for the study.
2. The intention is to present the project at a research conference or submit the project for publication.
3. Funding source requires IRB approval.
4. Faculty member supervising the project advises IRB submission.
5. Recruitment sites require IRB to recruit potential participants

**ALL projects must follow ethical principles and guidelines for human subjects research, regardless of whether they obtain IRB approval.**

Below is more information on UCLA's IRB Policies.

### Student Research Projects

All student-initiated activities that meet the definition of human subjects research must obtain IRB approval or certification of exemption from IRB review prior to initiation. IRB/OHRPP review and final approval should take place during the proposal stage of the dissertation or thesis, prior to the initiation of any research activities, including contact or recruitment of subjects. This requirement applies to both funded and non-funded research.

### Class Projects

Some projects assigned to students in research methodology classes are designed to teach students skills and provide the opportunity to practice methods such as observation, interview, or survey techniques, data analysis, etc. and may have a research component. Such classroom projects that are exclusively intended for instructional purposes and are not intended to develop or contribute to general knowledge or literature in the field need not undergo review by the IRB/OHRPP. However, both instructors and students should follow federal guidelines and University policy when designing and conducting class projects with human volunteers. When such projects are intended to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge, they are subject to the regulations and are required to undergo IRB/OHRPP review and approval, prior to the initiation of any research activities, including contact or recruitment of subjects.

More information is available at the following links:

Guidance and Procedure: Research Conducted by UCLA Students

[http://ora.research.ucla.edu/OHRPP/Documents/Policy/3/UCLA\\_Student\\_Research.pdf](http://ora.research.ucla.edu/OHRPP/Documents/Policy/3/UCLA_Student_Research.pdf)

Guidance: Determining Which Activities Require UCLA OHRPP/IRB Review

[http://ora.research.ucla.edu/OHRPP/Documents/Policy/3/Activities\\_Requiring\\_Review.pdf](http://ora.research.ucla.edu/OHRPP/Documents/Policy/3/Activities_Requiring_Review.pdf)

## Agency-Based Partnerships

Capstone projects based on partnerships with agencies are ideal because they embody the social work principle of building research from practice and using research to inform practice. In these partnerships, students do real-world projects that are valuable to the agency. These projects are usually first conceptualized by the agency based on a specific need for information to inform practice, and then refined and implemented by the capstone students. Communication is key to the success of these partnerships.

Agency-based partnerships coordinated through the department will be announced on a rolling basis in the students' first year winter, spring, and summer. Students will be notified about how to express interest and connect with agencies to determine a mutual good fit of the partnership.

Students can also create their own partnerships based on existing relationships they have.

Students are encouraged to do agency-based partnerships, because they enrich the meaning and value of the capstone experience tremendously.

## Dual Degree Students

Graduate Division requires separate capstones for each degree award. Capstones can be a comprehensive exam, research project, or thesis. Thus, students completing a dual degree with another department that requires a research project capstone or MA thesis may be exempt from the Social Welfare Research Capstone and instead will complete an oral exam at the end of the second year. Students in dual degree programs who complete a research project (MPP, JD, MA-Asian Am, PhD) can choose the format of their capstone – the MSW research project or an MSW comp exam. Please consult the MSW Handbook and confer with the Student Affairs Officer (SAO) to determine what format your MSW capstone will take.

## Individual Project Option

Qualified and motivated students may apply to complete an individual Capstone project in lieu of the group project. The individual project option involves an application process, due in late spring quarter of the first year (see dates for your cohort). The selection process for individual projects will be competitive, as only the strongest proposals will be approved, and the number of individual projects will be limited to ensure enough mentorship support is available.

The criteria for admission includes:

1. A GPA of 3.0 or better and evidence of strong performance in previous coursework, including research methods.
2. A research proposal that is feasible and shows promise for originality and rigor. See Appendix for the individual project template.
3. Identification of a faculty mentor willing to mentor the student. The mentor must be a Senate faculty member in the Department of Social Welfare, although co-mentors can be identified from other departments or universities. Not all senate faculty members are

available to mentor students in a given year. Students must connect with a faculty member **before** completing the proposal to get feedback.

4. A letter of recommendation from a faculty member (typically the identified mentor) that speaks to the student's qualifications and the quality of the proposal.

Individual projects will be primarily supervised by the faculty mentor. Mentors must be senate faculty members in the Department of Social Welfare. Students can also have a secondary mentor from another department at the university.

Students will also participate in the 260ABC course sequence. In case of conflicting feedback, the advice of the faculty mentor should be given priority. Individual projects must meet the same standards of quality as the group projects to pass the Capstone requirement. The final Capstone paper will be evaluated by two Senate faculty members within the Department. Each evaluator will assign a pass/fail designation to the Capstone project. In case of discrepancies among reviewers, a third reviewer reviews the Capstone project and makes the final determination. A pass on the Capstone project is required for graduation.

The Capstone course grades are separate from the final evaluation of the project. Students are responsible for reviewing the Capstone course syllabi for information on how course grades will be determined.

## Awards

Research awards will be given to students with outstanding research Capstones. Instructors and faculty reviewers will nominate outstanding capstone projects and capstone instructors will make the final decisions. Award winners will be announced at the end of the spring quarter. Each winner is given a gift card (specific amount is dependent on availability of departmental funding).

## Dissemination

Groups may decide that they want to disseminate the findings from their projects to their community partners or other relevant applied audiences. This is highly encouraged and expected of students who are working with a community partner. We encourage students to prepare a research brief, summary, or presentation for these audiences. Students conducting Capstone projects with agencies are required to provide a presentation, conversation, or report in addition to sending the partner the final paper. Students should deliver these products in a timely manner.

In preparing any reports and presentations, students should adhere to several guidelines related to dissemination:

- Students must ensure that data are only presented in the aggregate and not in any way that could identify any specific person.
- Students should ensure that data are presented as accurately as possible and base presentation on interpretations that have been vetted by faculty.
- Students should clearly state in the report that the research was conducted by UCLA MSW students and advise community partners to note this in any of their own dissemination efforts.
- Students should verify with agencies or any other entity involved in the research to determine whether they are comfortable with being named in the report or want their identity redacted.

If students wish to disseminate their results for publication in academic outlets, it is advisable to seek IRB approval prior to conducting the study. Typically, IRB approval is not granted retrospectively, and projects without IRB approval cannot be published in academic journals or presented at academic conferences. Students with a strong desire to publish their results in a peer-reviewed journal should speak to their instructors/mentors for guidance.

In the event that students with IRB approval for their project do pursue publication, it is important to have a conversation with the Capstone instructor and group members (and if, applicable, the community partner) about authorship. All group members should be listed as authors unless someone expressly asks not to be included. In some situations, where the Capstone instructor plays a major role in crafting the project and/or plans to support the students in publishing the

paper after instruction includes, the Capstone instructor should also be included as a co-author. Likewise, in cases where community partners play a big role in conceptualizing the project, collecting, and/or interpreting data, they may also desire or expect to be co-authors. This should be discussed openly, as individuals' views on authorship may vary.

## Challenges with Groups or Instructor

Sometimes, conflicts can arise within groups or between groups and an instructor. Some conflicts are disagreements about research approach or design, and those involved should make every effort to resolve these professionally and with openness. If these issues cannot be resolved, please contact the Capstone Coordinator to determine the next step, such as a mediated discussion. Sometimes conflicts come from uncomfortable or disrespectful interactions. These concerns should be discussed immediately with group members or instructors if those involved feel safe and comfortable doing so. Otherwise, please contact the Capstone Coordinator for confidential discussion to determine the best next steps for resolution and reconciliation.

## Frequently Asked Questions

- **How are Capstone instructors chosen? Why can't I choose my Capstone instructor?**

Capstone instructors will be matched with projects that are the best fit for their methodological or substantive expertise. Also, projects with similar approaches will be grouped together to facilitate opportunities for more targeted training. The matching process will be carefully done, taking into consideration the best interests of each student. Unfortunately, given the complexity of this process, we cannot accommodate students' requests for a specific instructor.

- **How often do Capstone courses meet?**

- During Fall and Winter Quarters, capstone courses are held every Tuesday and Thursday. Additional times for individualized mentorship with your group and instructor will be determined with your instructor based on student/project needs. Course meetings may include lectures, seminar-style discussions, or open time for groups to work together on their projects. Students need to be available on Tuesday and Thursday during the course meeting time throughout the entire year. If your section is not meeting, it is expected that you will use that time to meet with your group and move your project forward.

- **Can I form a group of 2 people or 5 people?**

No. Groups can ONLY consist of 3 or 4 people. Groups of less than 3 or more than 4 will not be permitted. The group size is important for equality in workload across students.

- **Can I choose to do the project by myself?**

Individual projects are an option, but applications must be submitted and accepted in spring of the first year. After this deadline has passed, additional individual projects will not be permitted.

- **What happens if I cannot find a group to belong to? What if I can't find a group to pursue the idea I'm excited about?**



Students can try multiple strategies to identify a Capstone group. If you are having trouble finding a group, please talk with the Capstone Coordinator. If you have not identified a group by the fall deadline and do not have an approved individual project, you will be encouraged to reach out to existing groups. As a last resort, you will be assigned to an existing group.

Ideally, all students will be able to pursue the topics that interest them most. However, group projects often involve some compromise. If you are passionate about an idea, try to get other students on board with it, but if you are not able to find a group that is excited about your idea, be open to other ideas and prepared to compromise.

- **How do I negotiate with my agency or entity in order to obtain data for the Capstone project?**

One of the fundamental challenges for all the groups in working with an outside entity is making sure the group can actually obtain the data detailed in the proposal. This will require, at minimum, that there is a written MOU in place detailing the type of data and the number variables, records and/or people necessary to complete the project.

- **There are one or more members of my group who are not part of the agency where we plan to collect data: How do we navigate this?**

Collecting data at your agency can lead to a meaningful Capstone project. However, you need formal permission from the agency, and your agency may have other guidelines to follow, such as limitations on who else can access the data. Your agency would need to give permission for someone outside of the placement to work with any identifiable data. The individual(s) at the agency may need to do all the data extraction and cleaning prior to giving other group member access to the data. If an arrangement cannot be reached, then the group will need to choose a different data source. Discussing the project with the agency over the summer could be a good strategy to avoid roadblocks in the fall.

- **How do I know if I need IRB approval?**

In general, Capstone projects do not need IRB approval. If you are doing a project with an agency that requires IRB approval, then you need to complete the IRB process prior to beginning recruitment or accessing any data. If you are doing an individual project, your Capstone mentor will help you determine if IRB approval is required, such as if peer-reviewed publication or conference presentation is a goal.

- **What happens if I do not pass the Capstone project?**

With initiative and hard work, along with guidance from your Capstone instructors, passing the Capstone project is straightforward. However, individual or group projects that do not meet the bar for passing will be given feedback and will have one opportunity to revise and submit for a second review. Students who do not pass the Capstone project in the second review will not graduate on time. The plan of study for these students (e.g., retaking course(s), redoing the project, receiving an incomplete and completing the Capstone over the summer) will be determined by the instructor, in conferral with the Department Chair if necessary, on a case-by-basis.

- **Why are only a small number of individual projects chosen?**

Individual projects require a substantial amount of student effort as well as faculty mentorship. It is important that we select projects that are feasible to complete within one year and that we have enough mentorship resources to provide students with adequate support to complete these projects.

- **If my individual project is not selected, can I revise it?**

No. Individual project proposals are evaluated only once at the end of the spring quarter through a highly selective process. Unfortunately, there is not an opportunity to revise. Individual project proposals that are not selected offer a great start for a group project. We encourage students to propose their individual projects to possible group members to see if they can form an interested group around the proposal.

- **For individual projects, how often should I meet with my mentor?**

We encourage students and faculty mentors to establish a regular meeting schedule that works for both. At minimum, students should meet with their mentors biweekly, but we strongly recommend meeting weekly to make steady progress.

## APPENDICES

### Individual Project Proposal Template [3-page limit]

[Name of Project]

[Name of Student]

#### Background

Describe an opportunity or problem that the project will address.

Why is the project being undertaken? Provide a rationale for the study.

Describe the contribution to the field this proposal may make when completed.

**Objectives** [PROVIDE AT LEAST ONE RESEARCH OBJECTIVE OR AIM. HYPOTHESES COULD ALSO BE DESCRIBED BUT ARE NOT REQUIRED FOR ALL STUDIES.]

- [specific & measurable objective 1]
- [specific & measurable objective 2]
- [specific & measurable objective 3]

#### Method [GIVE AS MUCH DETAIL AS YOU ARE ABLE.]

Describe the data you plan to use or collect.

Give an overview of the sample, recruitment, and data collection procedures.

Describe assessment tools or measures you will use.

#### Timeline and Phases of Work [SCALE TO FIT YOUR PROJECT]

	Summarize the work you will undertake across the capstone year and timeline for main activities.	Start and End Dates
Phase One	...	...
Phase Two	...	...
Phase Three	...	...

#### Key Stakeholders [IF APPLICABLE; SCALE TO FIT PROJECT]

		Have you secured the agencies written permission to conduct your study as described in this proposal?
Agency	[name]	
Agency	[name]	
Agency	[name]	

#### Personal Characteristics

[Briefly describe qualities that you possess, past experiences you've had, and/or strategies you will use to maintain progress over the year and successfully complete the project.]

#### Approval Signatures

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[Name], Student

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[Name], Faculty Sponsor