The Comprehensive Project

What is a Comprehensive Project? A comprehensive project is a two-quarter planning studio in which students work together to respond to a specific, real-world planning problem. Each project is sponsored by a client organization. Students work with their faculty adviser(s) and the client to establish the scope of work. They then organize themselves to assemble and analyze data, and to develop recommendations—policy and planning proposals, design guidelines etc. –to address the problem.

Deliverables. There are at least two deliverables from a comprehensive project. The first deliverable is a high-quality project report, similar to work produced by a professional planning consultant. The report must include technically-sound analysis, polished and grammatically-correct writing, and effective graphics. The second deliverable is a public presentation of findings. The audience for this presentation must include representatives from the client organization; it can also include the client's constituency, public officials, students, faculty, and others. The project may require other work products (e.g. a project web site, a policy brief, etc.); however, these will not serve as substitutes for the project report and presentation.

Student Responsibilities. Students should select comprehensive projects that enable them to build on the expertise they have acquired in the program. Capstones are not appropriate opportunities for learning new fields of study. Comprehensive projects are time-intensive. Students must be available for the entire two quarters with limited competing demands on their time. Working with the faculty advisor(s), students will develop a division of labor in order to complete the work. This often requires the designation of a project leader or manager as well as small groups that allow students to focus on the various dimensions of the project. Although students work collaboratively, they are required to produce a sole-authored section or chapter of the final report. This requirement ensures active participation by all members of the group and provides each student with a professional writing sample.

Faculty Responsibilities. Faculty advisers establish the basic structure of the two-quarter course. Their responsibilities include recruiting an enthusiastic client organization, working with the client to define the scope of the project and to set expectations regarding the quality of student work, developing a preliminary production schedule with clear benchmarks or interim deliverables, and providing students with the opportunity to get feedback on their work. Faculty advisers are also responsible for grading. Students who receive an "unsatisfactory" in the course will not fulfill the capstone requirement and, therefore, must take the two-week exam to graduate.

Timeline. Comprehensive projects are completed over a two-quarter period. The students should complete approximately 40 percent of the project by the end of the first quarter. Members of the project team should meet with the client regularly. A major mid-course or milestone meeting should be held at the end of the first quarter to provide the client with an update on the project and get feedback on any interim deliverables. The project report and final presentation are due at the end of the second quarter.

Grading (evaluation). Students will be evaluated based on the quality of their individual deliverables, their ability to work effectively with other project participants, and their active participation in all course-related activities.