

**Humphrey School of Public Affairs  
Master of Urban and Regional Planning Program  
Capstone Project Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

**1. What is the Capstone Workshop?**

The PA 8081 Capstone Workshop is offered as a three-credit course, with multiple sections available and taught by various MURP and other Humphrey School faculty members. Each section of the Capstone Workshop is organized around a topic area and may have multiple projects and clients.

Capstone Workshops are designed to provide a culminating learning experience for second-year students as they apply their knowledge through a team-project for a client (e.g. city government, state agency, non-profit organization). The projects allow students to gain important practical experience that will position them for professional success. In addition, the capstone experience facilitates student reflection on the knowledge and values acquired during the MURP program. Student teams gain experience in working collaboratively, interacting with clients, and in jointly managing projects. Teams typically prepare written documents consistent with planning practice, such as reports, plans, policies, case studies, and best practice reviews. In addition, students often have the opportunity to present their projects to clients, as well as other stakeholders. The workshop includes a written report for the client and an oral presentation to the client, and potentially other stakeholders, which summarizes the major findings of the project. Students are supported in their work by the course instructor, who provides guidance and feedback, leading toward the development of a professional quality project.

**2. When should I take the Capstone Workshop?**

The vast majority of MURP students take the Capstone Workshop during the spring semester of their second year. Part-time students or those who have transferred graduate credits into the program may take the Capstone earlier, under a recommendation by their advisor. Students in dual degree and certificate programs should consult their faculty and academic advisors to identify the appropriate timing for the Capstone and to determine whether project-based courses in their certificate or other degree program meets the requirements of the MURP curriculum. In the spring semester, there are typically two to four Capstone sections offered on planning-specific topics by MURP program faculty. Additional Capstone offerings by other Humphrey School faculty may be of interest as well. Students are encouraged to contact instructors to determine whether these Capstone offerings would be a good fit for their interests. A limited number of Capstone offerings are available during the summer and fall semesters, though the topics do not typically align with MURP interests.

### **3. When will I find out about what Capstone Workshops are offered?**

There are multiple ways that information about upcoming Capstone options is shared. Planning Capstone instructors typically provide information about their topics and intended clients and projects by no later than mid-October. Some information is typically available in the Course Guide and registration system. Additional information is often sent by email. In addition, a Humphrey School Capstone information session is typically held around this time as a means of sharing information about upcoming capstone opportunities. A summary of information provided at this session is circulated by email as well. While it is possible that information about Capstones may be available earlier than mid-October, it is typically difficult for instructors to finalize projects and clients before this time. Clients can often be hesitant to commit too far in advance, as project needs and staffing may change. In some instances (e.g. CHANCE capstone), specific projects may be identified at the beginning of the capstone class, via consultation, with clients.

### **4. Which capstone topics are available and how do I decide which one to pursue?**

Capstone topics vary from year to year, based on project availability, client interests, faculty capacity, and student enrollment in concentrations. We cannot guarantee that there will be a Capstone that will be aligned with every concentration, but the topics available are diverse and offer connections to most, if not all, concentrations. Because urban and regional planning is a broad field that explores intersections across land use, transportation, housing, community development, etc., it is possible and often likely that a Capstone listed as being focused on a topic such as transportation, will also have project components that relate to other issues such as environment, public engagement, and equity. Some Capstones intentionally cut across concentrations, such as recent offerings in Sustainability Planning, Parks and Urban Health, and Transportation and Land Use Planning. In addition, students are encouraged to use the Capstone as an opportunity to broaden their interests, explore a new topic, and engage with students in other concentrations and degree programs. Some Capstone faculty members specifically identify Capstone topics and projects to provide opportunities to address emerging urban planning topics or highlight issues not otherwise addressed in the curriculum. If you have questions about which Capstone offering might be the best fit for you, please contact your faculty advisor or the MURP Program Director. Capstone course instructors are also valuable sources of information.

### **5. Can I choose a workshop that is not taught by a MURP professor? Do I have to get permission to do so?**

Yes, it is possible to register for a Capstone section taught by a faculty member outside of the MURP program. As discussed in #2 above, students are encouraged to contact the instructors to learn more about the project(s) and assess the relevance to their interests. A permission number is not required.

**6. What if I don't like any of the Workshop topics offered? Can I write a professional paper instead?**

While some Humphrey School degree programs allow students to complete a professional paper, MURP students do not have this option. The MURP faculty has determined that the Capstone offers a critical learning experience that is distinct from an individual paper. Completing a capstone ensures that students will have the opportunity to work collaboratively on a team project, interact with a project client, and prepare a document or other product that aligns with planning practice. For those students seeking a more intensive individual research experience, there is a thesis option available in the MURP program. The thesis option is very rarely pursued, even among students who intend to seek a PhD.

**7. I have a great idea for a Capstone Workshop and a client to work with, can I create my own?**

Capstone topics are typically identified by the MURP and other Humphrey School faculty members. That said, it is sometimes possible to incorporate student-identified projects and/or clients into planned Capstone course offerings. Key considerations of faculty in evaluating potential projects include scale of project relative to the one semester timeline, prospects of interest among other students, commitment of client to engage with students on the project, and consistency of project tasks and outcomes with planning knowledge, skills, and professional practice. Students with potential interests in a project or client are encouraged to contact capstone instructors whose interests and knowledge align best with the topic. In addition, students are strongly encouraged to contact the MURP program director to discuss their interests and identify potential course and instructor matches.

**8. Where can I find examples of past Capstone Workshop topics and papers?**

Past Capstone Workshop reports (back to 2006) are available on the University of Minnesota's Digital Conservancy website.

The Humphrey School's Collection can be found here:

<http://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/36685>

**9. What is the Capstone Preparation Workshop and do I have to enroll in it?**

The PA 5080 Capstone Preparation Workshop should be taken by students at the beginning of the semester in which they enroll in a capstone, typically in the spring semester of their last year in the program. This one credit course offers brief immersive training in skills that can support work in the PA 8081 Capstone Workshop. Key topics addressed in the course include project management, group dynamics, and client interactions. The Capstone Preparation Workshop includes breakout sessions that allow Capstone Workshop teams to work together on group norms and memoranda of understanding for clients.

## **10. How are Capstone groups formed? Can I pick who I work with?**

Each of the Capstone Workshop instructors handles group formation differently. Often, students will be able to self-select, based on their project interests. However, if an instructor has committed to multiple clients, there may need to be a process by which students indicate their interests and are then matched with one of their top choices. Students are discouraged from prioritizing capstone courses and projects based on who might be on their project team. The Capstone provides a critical opportunity to gain professionally-relevant experience and thus prospects for building knowledge and making professional contacts should be prioritized.

## **11. What are the differences in workload between Capstone Workshops? Do we meet every week during the scheduled class time?**

Each Capstone Workshop instructor manages his/her course differently. Some instructors require weekly meetings that may include lectures, discussions, and guest speakers. This approach allows the instructor to provide additional content knowledge and skills needed to complete the project. Other instructors simply meet with students weekly to discuss project needs and process. Instructors may also use additional assignments, such as case studies, reflections, literature reviews, and other activities to build knowledge and generate content that will feed into the capstone project. Periodic reflection papers or online discussions may also be used to facilitate learning and explore professional practice topics. Typically, information about the structure of the course is provided via the Course Guide and capstone information session held during the fall semester (see #3 above).

## **12. How will my capstone be evaluated?**

Capstone project outcomes will be the primary basis for students' capstone grades. Feedback is typically gathered via a review and survey completed by the instructor and client. Student team members also have the opportunity to evaluate each other and the overall project outcomes. Students are strongly encouraged to participate in the project evaluation, as this information is important to our ability to track and report on learning outcomes to the Planning Accreditation Board.