

Columbia SPS Nonprofit Management Capstone Project

CLIENTS

Capstone Description

The Nonprofit Management Master's Degree Capstone Projects afford a group of students the opportunity to undertake complex, real-world, client-based projects for nonprofit organizations, supervised by a faculty member. Through the semester-long capstone project, students will experience the process of organizational assimilation and integration as they tackle a discrete management project of long or short-term benefit to the client organization. The larger theoretical issues that affect nonprofit managers and their relationships with other stakeholders, both internal and external, will also be discussed within the context of this project-based course.

Capstone Clients and Projects

Capstone clients are often established, mid-size nonprofit organizations based in New York City that address major societal issues; however, they can be new or smaller nonprofits in the area. Interested nonprofits approach our program with challenges which they would like our students to research, analyze, and recommend strategic solutions. Student skillsets required for each project range across the program's core and elective requirements, including communications and social media marketing, fundraising, strategic planning, governance and financial management. The leadership of these nonprofits has identified organizational and/or management needs and see the benefit of working with Columbia's Nonprofit Management Master's students, many of whom are seasoned professionals from the nonprofit, business, and other sectors.

Clients are vetted by the program director and faculty through highly individualized conversations with an interested nonprofit's executive director and other key senior personnel. Organizations are chosen because a capstone partnership meets the pedagogical requirements of the course. Through addressing a client's organizational needs, the course offers students an intense and integrative learning experience with a real-world client. The executive director, key staff members, and the board must be committed to collaborating with our students in understanding organizational needs and should remain open to the range of possible analyses and solutions that might result from the capstone experience.

Client Expectations

Clients can expect to work with a cohort led by faculty who are experts in the field. Capstone projects run for a 14-week semester and by the 13th week of the semester, students give a presentation and written report to their clients. In turn, we ask the following from our clients:

- A commitment from the board and executive director to the project;
- A point of contact within the client's organization who interfaces with instructor/faculty;
- Two meetings or calls with the program director and faculty before the semester starts;
- Materials, proprietary information, and other resources pertinent to the project, pursuant to a nondisclosure agreement;
- Student and faculty access to key personnel on an as-needed basis;

- Two meetings with students in person, with a possible third meeting: At the beginning of the semester, to give an overview of the organization and its needs, possibly a follow up or mid-semester meeting, and at the end of semester, to attend final presentation and give feedback.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQS)

Describe the student body.

Nonprofit Management students are typically full-time, mid-career professionals with experience in another sector. Some have advanced degrees and are experts in other fields. Three-quarters of the program's students are domestic and a quarter are international. Capstone students are required to have completed two-thirds of the curriculum or at least 24 credits before taking the capstone. Roughly 15 to 30 students take the capstone course per semester.

Who will be my main point of contact?

After your organization has been vetted and chosen by the program director and faculty, you will work with the faculty in outlining the project before the semester starts. Once the semester convenes, you will be working with student representatives. Students representing project teams will contact key staff members of your organization as needed.

How much interaction will I have with students?

You will interact directly with students at the beginning of the semester to give an overview of your organization and its needs and at the end of the semester to attend their presentation and give feedback. Key staff members of your organization will be reached by student representatives as needed.

Can I expect confidentiality?

Discussion in the classroom is confidential. Students share project information with each other, and with faculty, and expert advisers. All involved are notified not to divulge confidential client information outside the class environment and sign non-disclosure agreement forms (NDAs). The School does not make public student work without permission from students and clients.