# Pitching a Capstone Project for UBC’s *Advanced Professional Certificate in Behavioural Insights*

# Background

Behavioural Insights (BI) draws on the behavioural and decision sciences (the intersection of psychology, economics, consumer behaviour, and related fields) to understand and improve decision-making in ways that promote individual and collective “health, wealth, and happiness”. The guiding principle of BI is that small changes in the decision environment, tested carefully, can “influence behaviours for good” and have large and long-lasting benefits for individuals and society. BI is a tool that helps tackle a wide variety of problems across domains, from encouraging vaccination to reducing plastic waste to increasing license renewals and beyond.

With over 300 public-sector BI groups or “nudge units” across the world and widespread adoption of BI in industry, there is increasing demand for BI knowledge and skills among employers and employees. To meet this demand, UBC worked with a pan-Canadian steering committee to create the *Advanced Professional Certificate in Behavioural Insights* ([https://sauder.ubc.ca/CBS-BI](https://sauder.ubc.ca/CBS-B)), which provides rigorous BI training to working professionals. This part-time, online practitioner training includes coursework and hands-on experience through a capstone project.

For the capstone project, working professional students spend 9 months working in teams of 2-4 to apply their developing BI knowledge and skills to a capstone project. Each team works with a project partner on a real problem, which typically involves the development or use of programs, services, and systems.

# Sponsoring a Capstone project

Sponsoring a capstone project means that your organization receives free consulting from a team of 2-4 working professional students and their faculty advisor on a problem that’s important to your organization. There is typically no or a small financial cost. However, some staff time and resources are required in order for the project team to be able to help you tackle the problem.

Previous projects include working with:

* City governments to reduce illegal parking or illegal dumping.
* Provincial governments to increase appointment attendance or improve employee performance.
* Crown corporations to help employees return to work or shift users from paper to online forms/processes.
* Universities to de-bias performance evaluations or encourage sustainable food choices.
* Other organizations to increase program uptake.

For more about past projects, you can read a [blog post briefly summarizing 3 projects](https://bigdifferencebc.ca/blog/2022/3/18/ubc-dibs-case-studies-certificate-student-capstone-projects), [watch a team present their project](https://ubc.ca.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=616944c2-bdc3-4b91-a74b-af4800205508), or [read past projects’ working papers](https://blogs.ubc.ca/biwiki/bi-at-ubc/#WorkingPapers).

# Capstone Project Calendar

With the support of a faculty advisor, teams plan and complete a full BI project over the course of 9 months.

*Capstone Project Calendar for 2024-2025*



**June-August**

* **Idea Formulation:** Prior to the program start, faculty help students and/or partner organizations select and shape project ideas for submission.

**September**

* **Pre-Planning:** Once the program starts, faculty and students further shape project ideas based on course learnings. Faculty select a subset of projects to go forward (see criteria below) and student teams are created. Each team has 2-4 students and a faculty advisor.

**October**

* **Scoping:** The project officially kicks off with scoping to define the problem and plan the project (incl. a partner needs assessment and behaviour mapping). The team will need to meet with the project partner to learn more about the project idea.

**November-December**

* **Exploratory Research:** To better understand the problem (incl. the target behaviour and barriers), the team conducts literature reviews, user research, and baseline data. The team will need:
  + Access to the population of interest either online or in-person to conduct surveys, interviews, focus groups, or a similar methodology.
  + Access to baseline data to understand current behaviour.

**January-February**

* **Innovation:** Drawing on the behavioural and decision science literature plus their own exploratory research, the team works with the partner to design:
  + A BI solution to encourage behaviour change, and
  + A rigorous evaluation, such as a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) or quasi-experiment, to test if and how the solution changes behaviour.

The team proposes designs via a proposal presentation and report in early February and receives feedback from their peers, faculty, and the project partner. The team then iterates and finalizes their designs by the end of February.

**March-April**

* **Data Collection:** A Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) or quasi-experiment is run over several weeks to trial the BI solution. The team supports the project partner in trialing the solution and collecting data to measure behaviour change. The team will need semi-regular data to monitor data collection.

**May**

* **Evaluation:** The team uses descriptive and inferential statistical analysis to analyze, interpret, and visualize research findings. Based on the results, the team develops evidence-based recommendations for if and how to scale the solution.
* **Reporting:** The team shares their project via a final presentation and report at the end of May and receives feedback from their peers and faculty. The team then revises and shares their evidence-based recommendations with the project partner.

# Capstone Project Criteria

Challenges that lend themselves well to capstone projects share certain key criteria:

1. There is a **specific, pro-social behaviour** that will benefit the individual decision-makers and/or society. *For example, perhaps we want to encourage people to renew their dog licences with the city, recycle plastic waste at work, or register to donate blood.*
2. There is a **touchpoint with the population to** **explore their perspectives** on the problem **and** to reach them to **deliver an intervention**.   
   *Suppose we’re trying to increase dog licence renewals. You work for the city, which sends out notices (touchpoint) to dog owners (population). The project team would first reach out to some dog owners to learn why they do or don’t renew their dog licenses and then later trial an intervention (e.g., an updated, behaviourally-informed renewal notice) to increase renewal rates.*
3. There is **baseline data** about how many people do or do not perform the behaviour of interest plus **ongoing** **access to data** tracking this behaviour.   
   *For example, the city knows that there are approximately 2,000 licenced dogs out of an estimated 5,000 total dogs and the city records which owners renew their dog licences.*
4. The behaviour is **short and impacts a large population**.   
   *For example, renewal notices are sent regularly, people typically respond within 30 days (i.e., the behaviour of interest can be completed in minutes to weeks rather than months to years), and there are 5,000 dog owners (i.e., the population of interest includes hundreds rather than tens of people).*
5. The project is an **organizational priority** and your organization is willing to devote some staff time and resources toward the project, including **designating a project champion** to liaise with the team.   
   *This varies by project, but typically teams check in with the project champion every few weeks to maintain alignment and meets with a larger group from the partner at major decision points (3-4 times over 9 months). The partner also provides access to the population and data. Lastly, the partner provides timely approvals at key points, such as prior to user research and trial launch.*

**Capstone Project idea pitch**

If you’re interested in pitching a capstone project, please complete this form to help us understand your challenge and determine if it is a good fit for a capstone project. At this stage, your project ideas can be very broad and subject to change. Answers can be short—a sentence or two, or in some cases just a few words. **Please submit the form to** [**DIBS@sauder.ubc.ca**](mailto:DIBS@sauder.ubc.ca) **by July 31.** Please also reach out with questions.

**Nominator**

**Name:**

**Email address:**

**Organization:**

**Role at the organization:**

**The Challenge**

**What is the target behaviour** (i.e., what goal behaviour do you want people to perform)?   
*For example, dog owners should renew their dog license each year.*

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**Why is it a problem** (i.e., why do you want people to change their behaviour)?   
*For example, many pet dogs aren’t licenced, which means lost dogs are hard to return to owners, the city has trouble estimating the number of dogs and planning accordingly, etc.*

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**Who is the population of interest** (i.e., whose behaviour are you trying to change)?   
*For example, dog owners within the city.*

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**What are likely barriers to performing the target behaviour** (i.e., what are some of the reasons people don’t currently perform the goal behaviour)?   
*For example, dog owners don’t know the rules or reasons for licencing, they procrastinate, the registration system is complicated, etc.*

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**Roughly how many people do or should complete the target behaviour?**

*For example, maybe there are 2,000 licenced dog owners out of an estimated 5,000 total dog owners.*

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**How long does the target behaviour take to complete?**   
*For example, annual renewal notices are sent to dog owners four weeks prior to license expiration and renewing takes a few minutes.*

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**Project Features**

**Does the organization have ways to reach and communicate with the population of interest to explore their perspectives and to deliver an intervention?**   
*For example, the city can (1) post information at dog parks, email previously licenced dog owners, etc. to conduct surveys, interviews, or focus groups, and (2) send modified renewal notices to test a behaviourally-informed solution.*

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**Does the organization have data that tracks who does and does not complete the target behaviour?**   
*For example, the city has a database of registered dogs and records which dog owners renew their licences.*

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**Is this project a priority for the organization? Will the organization be able to devote some staff time and resources toward supporting the team, including appointing a project champion to liaise with the team?** (This varies by project, but typically: Teams check in with the project champion every few weeks to maintain alignment. Teams meet with a larger group from the partner 3-4 times over the course of the project at major decision points. The partner also provides access to the population and data. Additionally, the partner will need to provide timely approvals at key points, such as prior to user research and trial launch.)

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**Will the organization be able to provide initial approval from the required people/groups (e.g., managers or executives) by mid-September so that scoping can begin in October?**

(This is not expected to be final approval for a specific intervention, but rather initial approval that the project can be explored with the potential for going ahead.)

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