

# Empowering Capstone Students in Client Interactions

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## Undergraduate Capstone in Informatics and Software Engineering

- Student teams are matched with commercial, non-profit, academic, and government sponsors to develop software.
- Students act as an external consulting and software development house, and the sponsor is their client.
- Instructors act as coaches to the student teams. Class sessions include refresher lectures, discussion, student presentations, and studio critique.

## Client Expectations and “Managing Up”

- Students have strong technical knowledge, but have little experience with “real world” organizations.
- “Soft skills” like “managing up” and having productive disagreement with clients are central learning goals.
- In presentations, more than half of student teams cite managing sponsor relationships as a key challenge.

## Students Struggle with Sponsor Expectations

Slides from Student Presentations



## Moments of Disagreement between Sponsors and Students

- Effort and Knowledge Expectations
- Disregarding Capstone Course Requirements
- Late Project Changes and “Scope Creep”
- Unethical or Illegal Requests
- Bad Sponsor Behavior

## Mentoring to Empower Capstone Mentorship Focuses on 3 Key Components

Encourage students to recognize their own expertise and the value of their contribution.

Help students to communicate their analyses and decisions.

Act as a strong advocate for students, and be willing to intervene when necessary.