

THE CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE IN GENERAL EDUCATION, 12/1/06

The capstone experience represents the culmination of the university educational experience by linking the content and methods of the major with the goals of general education. Capstone projects provide evidence of how well a student integrates and applies principles, concepts, and abilities.

Common Expectations for Capstone Experiences

1. Each capstone must be at the senior level and synthesize the knowledge, approaches, and results from the major discipline with the foundation established in the general education program.
2. Capstone courses will be conceived, designed, and assessed within academic departments. The appropriate capstone experience will vary from discipline to discipline.
3. The capstone experience will provide evidence of student achievement at the highest levels of at least three of the four general education goals - critical thinking, communication, local to global connections, and community membership. For example, including three of the following goals in a capstone course syllabus would meet this expectation:
 - Demonstrate the highest level of communication skills using the content of the major discipline as indicated in the general education matrix.
 - Using the theories and perspectives of the major discipline, demonstrate the highest level of critical thinking as indicated in the general education matrix.
 - Demonstrate an understanding of ethics in the major, with regard to academic pursuit as well as professional practice.
 - Demonstrate the highest level of information skills appropriate to the major discipline.
 - Demonstrate understanding of the local to global intercultural perspectives of the major discipline.
4. Different assessment methods will be utilized depending on the type of capstone.
5. Implementation of the general education capstone requirements will be progressive. Even for departments and programs at Appalachian already offering or requiring capstone experiences in the major, the integration of general education goals will have to be a gradual process as the general education requirements are reconciled with those of external governing boards for departments and programs.

Model

1. Each department will decide how to implement the capstone for their major(s), whether it is a course, thesis, creative product, or internship.
2. The role of the general education administration will be to encourage and support the development of those courses and to assure that those courses meet the objectives described above.
3. One model is to have a Dean of General Education whose office would perform those functions. Another is to have a Capstone Experience Committee consisting of experienced faculty. Whatever administrative process is followed, we envision that departments will submit a form detailing the proposed capstone experience for each program. That form will describe the content, structure, and conduct of the course in such a way as to make clear what general goals and learning outcomes of the core are to be addressed and how they will be assessed.
4. Faculty development support will be critical for departments offering a capstone experience for the first time and for departments refining existing courses to meet the goals and learning outcomes embedded in the new core curriculum. That support will come in the form of workshops, online resources, faculty development grants, and others yet to be conceived. For example, the Writing Across the Curriculum program will help train faculty in methods for

incorporating writing in the capstone and will provide support for students in these capstone courses.

Remaining Questions

1. What is happening within academic disciplines and their governing boards with regard to general education?
2. What is a realistic timeframe for integrating general education goals into the capstone experiences of all departments?
3. Do we want to develop a generic course model for the capstone experience that could be adapted by departments not already offering a capstone experience, and what should that course look like?
4. Do we want to develop a writing intensive “senior seminar” course which would serve as a capstone experience for students in departments not offering one in the department?
5. Number of hours (1-4?)
6. Administration: what administrative structure would best support this and other components of an innovative core curriculum?
7. Oversight: how will capstone experiences be reviewed for content and accomplishment of intended
8. What is the role of the portfolio and ePortfolio?

Capstones at Other Institutions

- **University of Missouri /Columbia - capstone courses are required**
“Each academic unit will designate at least one capstone course for the degree program(s) it administers. [Course proposals](#) must be approved by the relevant school or division curriculum committee and by the Capstone Subcommittee of the Committee on Undergraduate Education.” The proposal form asks for a description of the capstone experience, an explanation of how “the nature of the academic work fall[s] within the purview of the student's area of concentration and also draw[s] upon knowledge acquired during the entirety of the student's education,” and how the student’s work will be evaluated.
- **University of North Carolina/Chapel Hill – capstone courses are strongly encouraged**
“Capstone courses particularly stress one or more of the following: the presuppositions of a discipline and how they determine the way it is studied; the intersection of interests between two or more disciplines; and the ethical implications of the ways in which knowledge is applied. Capstone courses are not required for graduation, but students are encouraged strongly to satisfy one or more of their four upper-level Perspective requirements with capstone courses.”
- **North Carolina State – capstone courses are primary assessment tools for the general education program**
“As a coda to their general education, students will complete an interdisciplinary capstone course as a way for them to reflect on their general education experience and to see how these courses connect to each other and to their major courses. ... The addition of the First Year GER Course and the Capstone serves two purposes. Most importantly, they will serve to provide coherence and structure for the entire General Education Program as noted above. However, they will also serve as the primary arenas for assessment of general education at NC State.”