Designing Capstone Experiences

Generally speaking, the capstone experience is a culminating set of experiences that “captivate, encapsulate, synthesize, and demonstrate learning.” As such, capstone experiences typically focus on synthesizing, integrating, and/or applying previous knowledge, rather than acquiring new knowledge.

Effective Capstones at a Research University

The Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University (2001) gives five recommendations for capstone experiences at research universities:

- Senior seminars or other capstone experiences appropriate to the discipline need to be part of every undergraduate program. Ideally the capstone experience should bring together faculty members, graduate students, and senior undergraduates in shared or mutually reinforcing projects.
- The capstone experience should prepare undergraduates for the expectations and standards of graduate work and the professional workplace.
- The experience should be the culmination of the inquiry-based learning of earlier course work, broadening, deepening, and integrating the total experience of the major.
- Whenever possible, capstone courses need to allow for collaborative efforts among the baccalaureate students.
- The major project should develop from a previous research experience or internship, as applicable.

Questions to Consider when Planning Capstone Experiences

- What framework best meets the needs of the program and its goals?
  - An interdisciplinary, synthesizing experience?
  - A discipline-specific, synthesizing experience?
  - A method to satisfy external industry/professional standard or requirements?
  - A reflective, synthesizing experience?
- Is it necessary to satisfy discipline/profession accreditation requirements?
- In what ways will the capstone experience be beneficial to the students’ post-baccalaureate experience?
- In what ways will the capstone experience support the (relevant) general education requirements?
- What components of the capstone experience will address students’ personal growth? Academic growth? Professional growth?
- How will students be guided toward and prepared for the capstone experience? What program structures will be in place (e.g., course requirements, pre-requisites, advising)?
Resources

University of Hawaii at Manoa’s Capstone How-To Website: *Capstone Experiences*


