

Senior Capstone Community Handbook

A Resource Guide for PSU University Studies Capstone Community Partners

Developed in collaboration by the
Office of University Studies
and the
Center for Academic Excellence / Community Based-Learning

The Senior Capstone at PSU involves four main roles: the student, the faculty, the community partner and the Capstone program staff. The success of the Capstone experience is largely dependent on the level of partnership and collaboration between community partner and PSU. This partnership often requires a commitment of time, effort and resources on the part of everyone involved; however, the resulting opportunity to enrich and apply classroom knowledge can impact students and the community in significant ways. This handbook is intended as one resource for support as you develop and sustain this critical partnership. As is the case with the Capstone program, this handbook is in the beginning stages. We welcome your suggestions about how to expand and refine it.

[What is the Senior Capstone?](#)

[Combining Service and Learning: Essential Elements](#)

[The Community Partner's Role in Capstone](#)

[About PSU Students: Who Are They?](#)

[Capstone Program Expectations for Community Partners](#)

[Student Responsibility in Community-Based Learning Checklist](#)

[Practical Suggestions for Working with Capstone Students](#)

[Capstone Support Staff: Who's Who](#)

PORTLAND STATE
UNIVERSITY

What is the Senior Capstone?

Senior Capstone: An Integral Component of the University Studies Program

The Senior Capstone is a community-based academic course taken at the senior level of students' education. Although each Capstone is unique in terms of community-based objectives and outcomes, every Capstone includes 4 goal areas:

- (1) improvement in students' ability to communicate effectively,
- (2) think critically,
- (3) work in a diverse society, and
- (4) act in socially responsible ways.

Each Capstone results in some form of summation, closing project, or final product that puts closure to the students' experience.

AS A RESULT:

Throughout the Capstone experience, the above four goal areas shape both the course and community project. For example, many Capstones contain projects that require significant oral presentation work or written report summaries. Often Capstone students are interacting with individuals or groups that they may not have come in contact with before. An additional aspect of many Capstone courses is the opportunity you have for collaboration with students on many aspects of the community partnership and project outcomes.

The Capstone Course

All Capstone courses are six credit hours, although some Capstones will be offered for one term only, while others will continue for two or three terms.

In addition, all Capstone courses will:

- provide an opportunity for students to apply the expertise they have learned in the major to real issues and problems in the community,
- enhance students' ability to work in a team context necessitating collaboration with persons from different fields of specialization, and
- encourage active involvement in the community.

AS A RESULT:

In light of the above Capstone objectives, students will most likely be working within some collaborative context with other students from various majors. Depending on the Capstone experience, students will likely be asked to apply the expertise gained from their majors in order to suggest ways that they will contribute to the community issue and to the Capstone project. You will be an important resource to the student teams as they become more knowledgeable about your agency, and as they work toward a deeper understanding of community issues.

Combining Service and Learning: Essential Elements

COMMUNITY VOICE

Capstone courses are developed as an ongoing process that allows individuals or communities with needs to define those needs.

ORIENTATION

A thorough orientation is vital to successful community partnerships. Additional guidelines for orientation appear on page five of this guide.

RECIPROCITY

The partnership must be worthwhile and valuable for both the student and the community. There must be reciprocity between all partners involved in the community-based experience.

REFLECTION

Intentional, systematic reflection must take place in order for students to situate prior knowledge within new ideas and information generated by the community-based experience. Reflection within the context of the volunteer experience encourages introspection in other aspects of the student's life.

DEVELOPMENT

Community-based learning occurs in different stages. For example, the learning experience often begins with pre-field preparation and moves to engagement in partnership with the community. Students move from defining and then problem-solving around community needs; from observation to experience to leadership. It is important to remain aware of potential challenges participants may face at various stages in the process.

MEANINGFUL SERVICE

Community-based learning tasks need to be worthwhile and challenging in order to encourage community involvement and to strengthen students' critical thinking skills. Academic rigor is not compromised — academic credit is for learning, not for service.

DIVERSITY

A priority is placed on involving a broad cross-section of students working in diverse settings and with diverse populations in the community.

EVALUATION

There are a variety of methods for evaluating student learning in the community-based context and for assessing how well the Capstone projects have met the needs defined by the community partner.

These principles are adapted from: The Wingspread Report: Ten Principles of Good Practice (1993). (Summary report resulting from extensive consultations between the National Society for Experiential Education and more than 70 organizations interested in service and learning.) Howard, J (Ed.) (1993). Praxis I: A faculty casebook on community service learning (pp. 3-12). Ann Arbor: OSCAR Press

The Community Partner's Important Role in Capstone

The community site can represent multiple aspects of students' Capstone experience: the community needs, the service requirements, the students' expectations about the site and the process of integrating all of the above! To make the most of the community learning environment, faculty and students and community partners should communicate their expectations and objectives as specifically as possible. These expectations and objectives should ideally be put in writing and can be revisited and modified throughout the Capstone if the need arises. Important areas for clarification include:

- the course goals and objectives
- the community goals and objectives
- the approximate number of students involved and student availability (specific times, days of the week, expected number of service hours, etc.)
- the kinds of skills necessary to complete the project
- the kinds of skills students bring to their work in the community
- Capstone student demographics and general profile of the PSU student population (**see About PSU Students: Who Are They?**)
- the level and kind of input faculty will provide to students about their community work
- the level of supervision and input the agency agrees to provide
- the level and type of responsibility agency staff can expect from Capstone students
- clearly outlined, specific expectations regarding the project timeline and the final product the community partner(s) expects to receive

About PSU Students: Who Are They?

- Nearly 24,000 students are enrolled at Portland State, including approximately 5,500 graduate students. (Graduate students are not required to take Capstones, but occasionally graduate teaching assistants will assist faculty in facilitating Capstone courses.) Approximately 55% of undergraduates are full-time students enrolled in twelve or more credit hours, while 45% are classified as part-time students. The average age of all PSU undergraduate students is 26.
- Approximately 83% of the University's students are Oregon residents. PSU also enrolls approximately 1,500 students from other states and over 700 international students.
- As an urban campus, PSU serves students in a large metropolitan community. Although some students live in residence halls, the vast majority of students commute from off-campus. A large percentage of PSU students hold either on- or off-campus jobs while attending classes. In addition, PSU has a fairly large number of returning students (students returning to school after an extended absence and/or students returning to further their education) and students who have children and other family responsibilities.
- When planning for student involvement in your agency, anticipate a wide range of background and experience. For example, some students will be "traditional" college age (18-24); however, many others will be older and/or returning students. Some students will have little community, work or volunteer experience; others will be active community professionals who handle a great number of work and family responsibilities. Planning for the Capstone with an awareness of the diverse characteristics of the PSU student population improves the experience for everyone involved.

Capstone Program Expectations for Community Partners

(1) Partnership Expectations

- Orient students and UNIVERSITY's representatives to the COMMUNITY PARTNER and Capstone project, and provide information regarding COMMUNITY PARTNER's administrative and operating policies, procedures, rules, and regulations;.
- Specifically what the duties and responsibilities students are expected to perform;.
- Provide students with on-going supervision and support as appropriate to the Capstone project and the student(s)' need;
- Offer feedback to faculty and students regarding the students' performance and effectiveness in meeting the needs of the COMMUNITY PARTNER;
- Ensure that the work is conducted in accordance with required safety precautions and procedures; and
- Make appropriate written arrangements with students and UNIVERSITY, signed by the parties involved, for use of work products resulting for the Capstone project, with regard to acknowledgment of authorship, rights to ownership and use and sharing of proceeds, in particular if the work results in patentable or similar products.

(2) Capstone Policy on Students in Private Residences

In cases where students are interacting directly with community members as part of their service work, students are not to enter community members' private home/residence under any circumstances.

(3) Capstone Policy on Sexual Harrassment

Students have the right to adequate supervision, feedback from supervisors, and a reasonably safe, harassment-free working environment. Sexual harrassment comes in many forms, but it is typically the use of power or authority by one person to pressure another person into accepting verbal, physical, or sexual conduct. Community partners should take reasonable steps to ensure that students have a productive working environment.

(4) Capstone Policy on Requests Directed Toward Students

Requests made of students should be limited to actions that directly pertain to students agreed-to service and academic responsibilities. Examples of inappropriate requests (outside of agreed-to responsibilities) include, but are not limited to: requests for personal favors, requests for loan of an automobile or other personal property items, invitations to social events not related to Capstone responsibilities, and requests for additional work or service hours above those that are required to complete the service portion of Capstone.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS MAY FIND IT HELPFUL TO DISCUSS THE STUDENT CHECKLIST WITH THE STUDENTS IN YOUR CAPSTONE. THIS CHECKLIST APPEARS IN THE PSU STUDENT HANDBOOK AND ALL STUDENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO REVIEW IT.

Student Responsibility In Community-Based Learning

The Center for Academic Excellence has provided the following information to enhance the learning experience of students and to attempt to protect them from harm.

I. Students should clearly understand the requirements of their community project:

- I have a clear understanding of both my instructor's and my community partner's expectations of me.
- I understand my parameters (I have thought of the consequences of performing actions beyond my agreed responsibilities).
- I have identified the skills needed to carry out this project, and I feel comfortable with those skills.
- I have identified the skills needed to carry out this project, and I have devised specific plans for strengthening skills with which I am not comfortable or familiar
- I know my client population (I am making every attempt to understand their needs from their perspective).
- I know what to do in case of an emergency.

II. Students need necessary legal documents:

- If I will be driving, I have a valid license and liability insurance.

III. Students should take responsibility for their behavior throughout the community- based project:

- I understand that I am responsible for my own personal health and safety.
- I have insurance (if agency requires specific coverage for volunteers).
- I understand the waivers I sign.
- I have thought of risks involved in this community-based project. For example:
 - What are clients' special needs?
 - In case of accidents, what is unsafe?
 - What can I do to reduce risks by my own behavior, clothing, preparation?
 - What behaviors fall outside of my job description?

Three legal issues to be aware of throughout your Capstone:

- I. Negligence involves a mistake, lack of attention, reckless behavior, or indifference to the duty of care of another person. A reasonable person should have been able to foresee the possibility of injury. (EX: wet spot on floor, child climbing on balance beam)
- II. Intentional misconduct or criminal misconduct involves potential harm caused by a volunteer. A volunteer is responsible for any harm caused to an organization or individual if the harm resulted from intentional or criminal misconduct on the part of the volunteer. (A crime is a crime even if you are a volunteer)
- III. Invasion of privacy involves confidentiality. Follow the confidentiality policies of the agency. If they do not clearly inform you of the policy ASK THEM for their policy guidelines regarding this. (EX: client histories and personal records are confidential.)

FOUR HELPFUL COMPONENTS OF COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS

- 1) Job description (explanation of duties/responsibilities)
- 2) Training (knowledge of procedures)
- 3) Tools to do the job required (appropriate technology, space, etc.)
- 4) Supervision (feedback from instructor & community partner)

Practical Suggestions for Working With Capstone Students

Adapted with permission from Community Agency Service-Learning Handbook, Miami-Dade Community College.

REMEMBER THAT CAPSTONE STUDENTS ARE STUDENTS, NOT VOLUNTEERS.

Not only do Capstone students want to help meet important community needs, but they are also utilizing the experience as the basis for their understanding of their college course material. Students are receiving academic credit for learning through their efforts. Help students think about what the experience means to them, and encourage them as they explore larger organizational and societal implications.

PLAN AHEAD.

Clear, well thought-out descriptions outlining tasks, responsibilities and skills needed are extremely helpful to the students. This could be part of the clarification process suggested on page three of this guide.

PROVIDE AN ORIENTATION TO YOUR AGENCY.

Orientation to your facility or agency is vitally important for students. This orientation may take place at PSU, the community agency, or some other location, depending upon the nature of the project. Orientation can include:

- A tour of the facility and an introduction to the staff
- A review of rules, policies, dress codes, timekeeping requirements, and other pertinent information
- A discussion of the students' role, including specific community expectations
- A description of the "larger picture": why you do what you do, and how the students' contributions fit in
- A review of skills needed to complete the community project
- An explanation of any jargon or site-specific language used by agency or community partners

KEEP STUDENTS' HECTIC SCHEDULES IN MIND.

Many PSU students juggle work and family responsibilities in addition to their full course loads. In order to plan their schedules, most students will need specific and reliable information about expected number of working hours, times and days of the week they are expected to work (if appropriate), as well as advanced notice of schedule changes if possible.

STAY INVOLVED.

You are truly a partner in the students' education, and they will benefit tremendously from your guidance throughout all phases of the community project. They will also appreciate regular feedback on their efforts, and acknowledgment of work well done.

SAY THANKS!

Capstone students are often anxious to become involved and make a difference in the community. Like everyone, they want to know if their efforts are appreciated, and to see how their work contributes to your agency's mission. Acknowledging their efforts could range from a simple thank you to letters of recognition.

COMMUNICATE!

Keep the Capstone faculty informed of any concerns, successes, or other issues related to the community project. Concerns should be communicated immediately so that you and your faculty partner can resolve issues that otherwise might impact the students or the project. The Capstone support staff is also available to provide resources to faculty and students covering a wide range of issues (see next page).

Capstone Support Staff: Who's Who

SEANNA KERRIGAN, CAPSTONE COORDINATOR

(725-8392)

Seanna's role includes working with community organizations to identify appropriate Capstone projects and working with University faculty to conceptualize propose and revise throughout the University's course approval process.

JANELLE VOEGELE, DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM COORDINATOR

(725-8341)

Janelle provides support resources for University faculty and students once the Capstone courses are in place. She provides training and materials on a variety of communication, group process, and diversity issues, as well as service-learning principles and practices. She also coordinates a team of University professionals who provide resources in areas such as health and safety, assessment, reflection, leadership and career development.

UNIVERSITY STUDIES OFFICE

(725-5252)

University Studies provides clerical support for the Capstone program. You can contact them in order to get partnership agreement forms, obtain information about the Capstone fair and Capstone-related events, and provides an ongoing communication link between community partners and PSU.

