PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY
annual assessment report 2010 - 2011

Excerpt: Capstone Communication Assessment
SENIOR CAPSTONE ASSESSMENT

TOOLS AND METHODS:

**Summative End-of-Term Course Evaluations**

**Capstone Student Experience Survey: Quantitative**

**Purpose:** The Capstone Student Experience Survey asked about students’ experiences in UNST Capstone courses as well as instructor pedagogical approaches and course topics. The survey results provide information to individual faculty about their courses and to the program about the overall student experience in Capstones.

**Method:** Students enrolled in Capstone courses complete paper-based course evaluations in class at the end of their course. During the 2010-2011 academic year, 2959 students completed surveys.

**Capstone Student Experience Survey: Qualitative**

**Purpose:** Each year the Capstone Office analyzes students’ written comments from the end-of-term course evaluations in order to learn about the lived experience our students have in Capstone courses. The data is collected to assist individual faculty in improving the teaching and learning in their courses and it allows us to document students’ most important learnings as well as their suggestions.

**Method:** The Capstone Office created a database which randomized all of the students’ comments from 2010-2011. Two-hundred random comments were selected for analysis from the question regarding the students’ most important learnings and 200 random comments were selected representing students’ suggestions for improvements. As in previous years, two PSU researchers analyzed the comments separately according to the procedures outlined by Creswell, 1994.

**Capstone Course Portfolio Review**

**Portfolio Assessment: Communication**

**Purpose:** Capstone course portfolios were developed as a method to assess student learning at the Senior Capstone level of the University Studies program. In the past, we have assessed common reflection assignments, course-specific reflection assignments and Capstone final products for evidence of student learning in Capstone courses. None of these approaches were able to capture and display the complexity of student learning in a community-based group-focused course. Two years ago we developed course-based portfolios for Capstones which include syllabi, assignment instructions, examples of student work produced in the course, and faculty reflection.

**Method:** All Capstone instructors were invited to create course portfolios during Winter Term 2011. The group that was coordinating this project chose to focus on the University Studies Communication goal. Capstone instructors were offered a $250 stipend to provide the materials needed for the portfolios as well as complete a reflection about how they incorporate diversity into their courses. Sixteen course portfolios were constructed for assessment. These represent 49 sections of Capstone during the 2010-2011 academic year, which enrolled 754 students (approximately 25 of the courses and students in the Capstone program during the school year).

To assess the course portfolios a group consisting of the Capstone Director, the Assessment Coordinator, and a Capstone faculty member constructed a framework for evaluating communication in these course portfolios. This framework included a list of the types of learning related to communication that occur in Capstone courses and a scoring guide that included information on scoring portfolios as inadequate, adequate, or exemplary. On the portfolio review day, 4 Capstone faculty members reviewed the 16 portfolios, with each portfolio being scored twice. In addition to an overall rating, reviewers rated each element of the portfolio, gave the program additional information, and identified components that could be used as examples for other faculty.

**Pedagogical Catalysts of Civic Competence**

excerpted from a dissertation summary

by Stephanie Stokamer

**Purpose:** University Studies partnered with a doctoral student who is also a Capstone faculty member providing 5 years’ worth of quantitative data used in her dissertation research. The overarching research question guiding the study was: What are the pedagogical catalysts of civic competence in community-based learning courses? Two sub-questions guided this research and drew from student survey data for analysis. In community-based learning courses, (1) What are the student characteristics of civic competence? and (2) Are there identifiable patterns of relationship between elements of pedagogy and development of civic competence?

**Method:** The data came from the required interdisciplinary community-based learning program at an urban research university. The sample consisted of 10,974 students between 2005-2010, representing about 150 courses a year or approximately 700 sections. The instrument was the course evaluation survey students take to assess the course and report their learning. This survey includes indicators of student learning and of teaching methods, offering the opportunity to both test the proposed model and examine the relationships between pedagogical elements and civic competence outcomes in a way not yet offered through previous research. Item analysis and factor analysis were used to examine the data. The pedagogical elements were correlated with outcomes using cross tabulations and the Pearson Correlation Coefficient, revealing whether there was any association between instructional techniques and students’ civic competence.
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The course portfolios demonstrated that by and large students are given opportunities to engage in and demonstrate learning related to communication. Twelve out of 15 courses were assessed as adequately meeting expectations for addressing ethics & social responsibility or as exemplary courses, incorporating many aspects of communication throughout the course.

For courses that were judged to be exemplary, student work samples and assignment instructions were specifically influential. Students in these courses were asked to engage in multiple forms of communication and given opportunities to process their growth as communicators. The faculty reflection clearly discussed how the examples of assignment instructions and student work samples supported student learning related to communication.

For courses that were assessed as inadequate, the materials compiled in the portfolio did not clearly reflect the type of learning opportunities that were defined. Communication is clearly present in all courses, but students were not always directed to intentionally practice communication skills and then identify and reflect on those skills. These courses tended to provide opportunities for only one or two types of learning related to communication and did not clearly demonstrate that communication was addressed as a goal in the course. For example, there were many courses where students engaged in group work, but not all were asked to think about their roles in groups and how the group was communicating. We want to emphasize that while Capstone courses should incorporate all Four UNST goals, it is difficult to focus on all of the goals equally in one course. The courses that did not provide adequate learning opportunities related to communication likely focused more heavily on other UNST goals.

Pedagogical Catalysts of Civic Competence

Results indicated that the epistemological conceptualization of civic competence was sound as proposed but strengthened further with slight revision, such as realigning items and simplifying constructs. The 14 outcome items held together conceptually as a representation of civic competence (r = .917) and for the individual components (e.g. r = .848 for skills) and domains (e.g. r = .753 for civic knowledge). Cronbach’s alpha never fell below r = .500, indicating moderately strong relationships among the items, but the results also ranged from r = .592 for efficacy to r = .848 for skills. It is unclear from these procedures alone whether these same constructs would emerge when not “forced” upon an existing instrument or whether any other combinations of items could contribute to the theoretical foundation of the model.

Principal component analysis was thus used to determine how the items group together without the researcher’s imposed constructs, following procedures for best interpretability (Green, Salkind, & Akey, 2000; Field, 2009). This approach retained four factors that offered strong confirmation of the proposed epistemology of civic competence, although slight variations in how items combined further informed the model (see Figure 3). For example, attitudes (r = .707) and actions (r = .506) emerged as more salient and appropriate labels for what had been termed dispositions (r = .593) and identity (r = .652), and efficacy was redistributed throughout all of the concepts. Another item analysis of the newly grouped items further supported the shift and led to generally higher Cronbach’s alphas.

Correlations were run between the instructional items and each of the four components, each of the domains, and the overall construct of civic competence using new outcome variables computed from mean scores. The pedagogical practices with the strongest relationships to civic competence are (1) exploration of diversity (r = .552), (2) a syllabus that clearly connects service work to course content (r = .569), and (3) activities that engage students in their learning (r = .539). The results showed both effective faculty strategies (e.g. 80% of those attaining knowledge outcomes indicated that their instructors used class discussion) as well as what might enhance outcomes if utilized more frequently (e.g. topics of race or political issues, used by only half of faculty but associated with civic competence).

These results strongly substantiated the pedagogical ring of the model, with the pedagogical catalysts most strongly and consistently associated with civic competence exemplifying the proposed pedagogical elements of course design (exploring diversity, r = .552), teaching strategies (engaging activities, r = .539), and integration of service (clearly connected in the syllabus, r = .569). Most importantly, the exploration of diversity significantly enhances all civic competence outcomes, reinforcing the connection between competent participation in a pluralistic democracy and community-based learning for social justice, and suggesting alignment between critical pedagogy and this model. Thus this new conceptualization has been deemed the Critical Pedagogy Model of Civic Competence.
Capstone Course Portfolios

COURSE PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT PROCESS

We followed the same procedure that we developed last year, offering an overall score for the course portfolio in addition to scores for the portfolio components. As we reviewed the portfolios, the reviewers had some suggestions to make the review process more productive. In particular, they suggested that the instructions given to faculty for their reflection ask faculty to be more explicit in identifying the specific skills they emphasize in the course and then providing evidence of that through connections with the syllabus, assignment instructions, and student work. The reviewers wanted to see a clearer link between the course activities and the student learning as articulated by the faculty member.

COMMUNICATION LEARNING GOAL

Overall, the course portfolio process revealed that students generally have opportunities to meet our communication learning outcomes as stated. However, the goal of communication was much more challenging to evaluate through Capstone course portfolios than the goals of Diversity and Ethics and Social Responsibility, which we reviewed in the last 2 years. One reviewer framed it as a problem of presence versus richness. Because communication is required to accomplish the tasks of a Capstone course, the presence of communication was easily discernable. It was clear that communication was happening in the courses; students gave presentations, worked in groups, turned in written assignments, and produced materials (e.g., grants, web sites, etc.) for use by community partners. It was less easy to discern the mechanisms used to enhance these skills in students or to encourage students to examine their communication skills in the context of the course. Students described the kinds of communication they used in the Capstone course, but not whether or how the course had enhanced those skills. Reviewers wanted to see that students could articulate how they were communicating in new and complicated ways, that the course moved students to a new depth of communication, or that the course helped students develop skills they would use elsewhere. In the courses that were rated exemplary, there were clear opportunities for students to practice a communication skill (e.g., interviewing), reflect on that practice, identify areas for improvement, and then reflect overall on the specific skills they honed during the course. Because the overall evidence was not as rich as was expected, it may make sense to revisit the communication learning goals as currently articulated, focusing on clearly explaining the expectation for meta-cognitive opportunities and the identification of and reflection on communication skills. The courses rated as exemplary can provide models for others.

Pedagogical Catalysts of Civic Competence

Diversity is essential to the development of civic competence, supporting pluralistic democracy and community-based learning for social justice.

This finding suggests that diversity of thought and experience should be creatively woven into all types of community-based learning to enhance civic competence. This result also supports practices such as international service-learning to develop global citizenship competence (Battistoni, Longo, & Jayanandhan, 2009). Moreover, critical pedagogy is necessary to most deeply and effectively help students understand community-based learning in the broader spectrum of civic participation for social change, to create space for dialogue around issues of privilege and difference, and to challenge systems of oppression (Kitano, 1997; Souza, 2007; Yep, 2011).

Service should be thoroughly integrated into a course through the syllabus and community partnership in order to maximize civic competence. For over 10 years scholars have maintained that in order to maximize benefits and make genuine contributions to community, service-learning must be well integrated into course work (Cress, 2011; Hatcher, Bringle, & Muthia, 2004; Eyler, 2002; Howard, 2001). This study offered a practical rubric for revising syllabi to most effectively catalyze civic competence adapted from Kitano’s (1997) concepts of Exclusive, Inclusive, and Transformed syllabi for multiculturalism. The Stokamer Taxonomy of Course and Syllabus Change for Civic Competence could be invaluable for faculty professional development workshops, program assessment, or individual review of course syllabi, and it could also be adjusted for co-curricular programming.

Overall Reflection

In summary, the data collected this year reflects the consistency of the high quality of teaching and learning that takes place in Capstone courses, especially in the arena of the University Studies goals. Capstone students continued to report deepened critical thinking skills, enhanced communication skills, furthered appreciation for human diversity, and a commitment to social responsibility. The Capstone Office is committed to improving Capstone courses, especially the handful of courses where students disagreed that faculty provided clear grading criteria and neglected to provide meaningful feedback on student work. Next year, the Capstone office will work with data gathered from our Camp Kiwanis partnership to distill the most significant learning experiences graduates report having in their careers at Portland State. Researchers will explore the relationship between Capstone course experiences and those reported significant learning experiences in order to further our understanding in the field of best practices in education.