FOCUS OF THE YEAR

This year the Capstone Office focused on four areas:

- As suggested in the 2013-14 annual assessment report, we worked with an outside diversity consultant to help support student learnings related to the appreciation of human diversity especially in our discipline-specific Capstones.
- We worked extensively with faculty on the Communication (Writing) goal. We framed this work in terms of their participation in the work sample assessment which included multiple meetings to talk about effective assignments to help students articulate their learnings related to communication.
- We continued to work on best practices of teaching community-based learning Capstones via our monthly brownbags.
- We intentionally dedicated .5 of an experienced online faculty member to help support our faculty teaching online Capstone courses.

TOOLS AND METHODS

Summative End-of-Term Course Evaluations

Purpose: The Capstone Student Experience Survey asked about students’ experiences in University Studies (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 Capstone courses.

Method: Students enrolled in Capstone courses complete paper-based course evaluations in class at the end of their course. During the 2014-2015 academic year, 2862 students completed surveys. We aggregate quantitative responses in order to observe trends over time. Capstone faculty also analyze a random sample of student comments from the course evaluation which supplement the quantitative information.

Small Group Instructional Diagnostic (SGID)

Purpose: Each term, an SGID is conducted in 20% of Capstone courses. These small group feedback sessions are conducted during the middle of the term in order to provide formative feedback to the Capstone faculty.

Method: An experienced Capstone faculty member goes into a Capstone course taught by a different faculty member and conducts a focus-group like discussion. The SGID covers course content, community work, suggestions for improvement and the UNST learning goals. SGID data were collected in 22 Capstones during the 2014-15 academic year. 14 of those SGIDs were done by a trained facilitator in face to face courses. 8 SGIDs were conducted by the Faculty in Resident for Online Community-Based Learning. The data were analyzed by two Capstone faculty to identify themes across courses. Student comments were organized by category and ranked according to the number of times each category was mentioned.

Capstone Course Portfolio Review

Capstone Course Portfolio Assessment: Communication

Purpose: Capstone course portfolios were developed as a method to assess student learning at the Senior Capstone level of the UNST program. We developed course-based portfolios for Capstones which include syllabi, assignment instructions, and examples of student work produced in the course as a way to capture and display the complexity of student learning in a community-based group-focused course. This year’s process built on lessons learned from the approach piloted in AY 2013-14, the dual purposes of which were to engage participating faculty in a summative programmatic assessment that also served as a formative faculty development experience.

Method: Capstone instructors were invited to create course portfolios during the 2014-2015 academic year. 14 course portfolios were constructed for assessment. This year, in order to engage faculty more fully in the assessment process, we held initial meetings where faculty shared with each other the ways in which they incorporate a focus on communication in their Capstone courses. They also discussed the assignments they would be submitting. The artifacts submitted by the faculty included their course syllabus, the assignment they had chosen to illustrate learning around the communication goal, and student work samples from that assignment. These portfolios were uploaded to a secure password-protected site for viewing only by participants on the day of review.

To assess the course portfolios a group consisting of the Capstone Program Director, the Director of Assessment and Upper Division Clusters, 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, ten Capstone faculty members, the Capstone Program Director, and the Director of Assessment and Upper Division Clusters reviewed the portfolios, with each portfolio scored at least twice. During the review process, faculty provided a quantitative score and brief qualitative responses indicating the strength of the portfolio’s evidence of student engagement with the communication goal, data which are reviewed only by the Director of Assessment and Upper Division Clusters and the Capstone Program Director (and which, in aggregate form, are commented on elsewhere in this report). Further, faculty reviewers offered their colleagues formative feedback through responses to the questions “What stood out to you as a reviewer of this portfolio, relative to the UNST goal of communication?” and “From your knowledge of this Capstone and your reading of this portfolio, what possibilities do you envision for even greater student engagement with the communication goal in future offerings of this course?”

Following an explanation of the process, faculty performed a calibration on a sample portfolio from a prior year’s assessment, discussing their responses to the sample in the large group. After sufficient discussion of the sample work, 3-4 person groups of faculty were formed, with the Capstone Program Director, the Director of Assessment and Upper Division Clusters, and the Faculty Support Specialist each serving as a facilitator of one group’s process. In these small groups, each faculty member described their course and contextualized student engagement around the communication goal in the course generally and as evidenced in their selected assignment in particular. After a lunch break, faculty reviewed each of their group member’s portfolios, completing both the summative and formative assessment documents identified above. Following the review of portfolios, the small groups reconvened to share the formative responses with each faculty member of the group. A large group discussion of the themes revealed in the feedback, a debrief of the process, and the completion of evaluations on the day’s activities rounded out the agenda.

ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Capstone Student Experience Questionnaire: Quantitative

In 2011-2012, PSU began offering discipline-based Capstone courses which involved developing new models for delivery of Capstone courses. We anticipated and indeed observed that the student course evaluations might fluctuate as we worked on discovering the best approach for these courses. Last year’s course evaluations improved significantly in our discipline-based Capstones, and therefore, when aggregated with all UNST Capstone courses, significant improvement was shown. The data from AY 13-14 demonstrates that Capstone courses overall improved in every area of the Student Learning Experience as well as the Capstone Instruction. During AY 14-15, Capstone courses maintained those high levels of performance.

Capstone Student Experience Questionnaire: Qualitative

Vicki Reitenauer

An analysis of 200 comments responding to the questions “What were your most important learnings from this Capstone?” and “What suggestions do you have to improve this Capstone?” collected through Capstone end-of-term course evaluations revealed themes consistent with past analyses. With regard to the first question about most important learnings, Capstone students continue to report that the experiential, applied, hands-on nature of the course offer them learnings that “can’t be taught in a classroom” in ways that lead to increased capacity for communicating and collaborating across difference, appreciation of the diversity of persons within our shared communities, integration of content knowledge (around, for example, water systems, incarceration, and organ donation), and understanding of one’s responsibility to engage in pro-civic behavior. Within their comments, many students expressly indicate how they expect these learnings to serve them after graduation. Both as part of a more comprehensive response to this question and in stand-alone comments, a significant number of students identified their instructor and the instructor’s qualities and professional example in the Capstone as the most important learning they are taking from the course.

Quite a number of students cited outcomes that had expanded their sense both of self-efficacy and of openness to learning from others. For example, one student reported that the Capstone provided “[t]he ability to stand back and allow who you’re serving or working with to teach you, even guide you, in subtle ways when you open yourself up to it.” Another said that “This course was extremely difficult and pushed me to my limits. Whenever I ran into something I thought I didn’t have the capability of doing, I proved myself wrong.” The phrase “making a difference” and “making change” showed up repeatedly in students’ comments, including this one: “I learned that I am very capable of making a change in my community. I had been a little resistant to educate myself about current issues (nationally and locally) prior to this class, but feel like this class has given me the tools to understand the issues that directly affect me, and to share my knowledge with others.”
In response to the question asking for suggested changes to improve the course, 85 out of 200 students (42.5%) reported that no improvements were needed to their Capstone. Suggestions for changes often communicated students’ desire for more structure, organization, or clarity in the course, as well as both general and specific suggestions for improved communication, particularly in courses that involved a high degree of immersive direct service. A number of students also indicated that they wanted “more:” more contact with community partners, more in-class time (as opposed to online communication), more frequent class meetings (e.g., class meetings twice rather than once a week), longer courses (particularly in the case of condensed summer term offerings), two-term offerings of courses, and even 12 credits committed to the Capstone (instead of 6).

In summary, students report deep richness and meaning in their learnings from their Capstones and often anticipate the ways they expect these learnings to serve them in the future. Slightly more than half also identify possible shifts that could make their Capstones even more effective. Ongoing faculty support efforts, engaged on the individual, group, and programmatic levels, continue to address these areas for improvement in intentional and directed ways.

**Small Group Instructional Diagnostic (SGID)**

Celine Fitzmaurice & Vicki Reitenauer

During the SGID feedback processes conducted during AY 2014-15, Capstone students were asked to report out on four questions: 1) What, in their Capstone, is helping them to learn course content and do their community work; 2) What, in general, could be changed to improve the course; 3) What specific suggestions do they have to bring about those changes; and 4) How the course was impacting their learning around the UNST goals.

In response to the first question, students seemed to gain the most from readings, discussions, the applied nature of the coursework, instructor expertise and support, opportunities for collaborative work, community partner site visits and/or orientations in the classroom, and field trips/interactive learning. Students’ suggested improvements to their courses, both general and specific, centered on desiring greater clarity (e.g., a clear syllabus, clear assignment instructions, and clear criteria for grading), more instructor input regarding projects and ongoing grades, better selection and development of community partners, greater exposure to community partners, and more time in the community.

Students’ responses to the question regarding the UNST goals found students most frequently mentioning the appreciation of Diversity of the Human Experience as a central focus and source of learning in their course. The goals of Communication and Social and Ethical Responsibility had an equivalent number of mentions (with the total number slightly fewer than for the diversity goal), with Critical Thinking receiving the fewest mentions.

These data suggest to Capstone faculty support specialists that a focus be put on Critical Thinking in upcoming Capstone workshops and retreats, alongside our continuous efforts to support individual faculty to identify, develop, and utilize their own best practices as Capstone instructors, with these and other sources of student feedback as a guide.

**Capstone Course Portfolios Ratings**

**Capstone Course Portfolio Assessment: Communication**

- The course portfolios demonstrated that by and large students are given opportunities to engage in and demonstrate learning related to communication. All of the courses were rated at least adequate and three out of the 13 were rated exemplary.
- Reviewers documented the types of learning related to communication that they observed in the course portfolios. Students had the most opportunity to write reflective essays analyzing new insights and growth developed as a result of working with a team or group and further their meta-cognitive skills, articulating how they deepened their ability to reflect on those learnings and the meaning those learnings have for them. Course portfolios provided the least evidence that students were able to practice various forms of professional writing.
- Courses that were rated exemplary provided students with experiences of many modes of communication. Multiple types of writing were represented (e.g., reflective, professional, blogging, experience logs) as well as opportunities for focus on group communication and presentations. These courses also provided a specific focus on communication, prompting students to identify the skills they were building as part of the course.
Capstone Course Portfolio Process

Faculty evaluations of the course portfolio process reveal that faculty found their time reviewing each other’s work and giving and receiving feedback on portfolios to be deeply valuable and meaningful. All participants affirmed that the process felt both supportive of their work as Capstone instructors and they felt inspired by the fresh ideas and approaches that their colleagues shared. In response to the question “What are you taking away from today’s session?” one participant wrote “That the work is having an impact;” a second wrote “revitalize this goal in my course;” and a third indicated that they had deepened their “commitment to add support for community partner relationships.” Another remarked that the day had “reaffirmed a sense of value in sharing with colleagues,” and still another reported “appreciation for assessment process.” One participant, in response to the question “How will you use your takeaway(s) in future settings?” wrote “I’m heading to my office right now to note changes to my syllabus and assignments,” with a second similarly (and simply) stating “for course revision immediately;” another indicated that that they would “continue to come to gatherings such as this to share, analyze, review, and learn from each other.”

Additional questions asked participants what worked best about the day’s process and what recommendations they had for shifts to the assessment structure and/or process for future assessments. To the former question, participants consistently reported on the value of the intentional small- and large-group discussion groupings and the varied mix of activities (including the use of a poem to start and end of the day). Several participants, in response to the question asking for suggested changes to the structure and/or process, explicitly requested follow-up sessions to report out on and hear about shifts made to courses as a result of this process. Additionally, participants requested more specificity in the guidelines for portfolio submissions in order to more carefully select assignments and artifacts in the future and suggested the development of an online assessment process so that more faculty could participate.

All of the qualitative feedback submitted by faculty confirmed that participants found the process helpful as practitioners, and felt motivated to spend more time relating to their colleagues to seek both mutual support and inspiration for course improvement. Many desired to see the process expanded to include more colleagues and to extend this process into the future so that they might continue to see and reflect collectively on course improvement.
The Senior Capstone Learning Experience
Ratings made on a scale of 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree.

Percent of students who agreed or strongly agreed

- **The community work I did helped me to better understand the course content** in this Capstone.
  - 89.9%

- **I feel that the community work I did through this course benefited the community.**
  - 87.3%

- **I felt a personal responsibility to meet the needs of the community partner** of this course.
  - 87.5%

- **I was already volunteering in the community before taking this course.**
  - 76.4%

- **I improved my ability to solve problems** in this course.
  - 84.0%

- **This course helped me understand others who are different from me.**
  - 88.1%

- **My participation in this Capstone helped me to connect what I learned to real life situations.**
  - 87.9%

- **This course enhanced my communication skills** (writing, public speaking, etc.).
  - 76.2%

- **I will continue to volunteer or participate in the community** after this course.
  - 74.5%

- **This course enhanced my ability to work with others** in a team.
  - 81.6%

- **In this course I improved my ability to analyze views from multiple viewpoints.**
  - 84.9%
## SENIOR CAPSTONE ASSESSMENT

### Percent of students who agreed or strongly agreed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>09-10</th>
<th>10-11</th>
<th>11-12</th>
<th>12-13</th>
<th>13-14</th>
<th>14-15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This course explored issues of diversity (such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation).</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>66.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe this course deepened my understanding of political issues.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The syllabus clearly described how the course content connected to the community work.</td>
<td>84.3</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe this course deepened my understanding of local social issues.</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>83.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I now have a better understanding of how to make a difference in my community.</td>
<td>80.3</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>80.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had the opportunity to apply skills and knowledge gained from my major.</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>74.9</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had the opportunity to engage with students from different fields of specialization.</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>92.6</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>93.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- ▶ = highest percent
## The Senior Capstone Faculty
Ratings made on a scale of 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree.

### Percent of students who agreed or strongly agreed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>09-10</th>
<th>10-11</th>
<th>11-12</th>
<th>12-13</th>
<th>13-14</th>
<th>14-15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Showed a personal interest in my learning.</td>
<td>92.1</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td><strong>93.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled work at an appropriate pace.</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td><strong>90.9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide clear instructions for assignments.</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>85.8</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td><strong>86.6</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created an atmosphere that encouraged active participation.</td>
<td>94.8</td>
<td>93.9</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>93.9</td>
<td><strong>94.2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presented course material clearly.</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>88.1</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td><strong>90.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created an atmosphere that helped me feel personally engaged in my learning.</td>
<td>90.3</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>87.9</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td><strong>89.9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided helpful feedback.</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td><strong>84.7</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related course material to real-life situations.</td>
<td>93.9</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td><strong>93.5</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged interaction outside of class.</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>82.6</td>
<td>88.1</td>
<td><strong>86.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided clear grading criteria.</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>86.4</td>
<td><strong>82.8</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = highest percent
The Senior Capstone Course Portfolio Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portfolio Rating</th>
<th>Number of Portfolios</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplary</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Portfolio element**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syllabus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student work samples</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**REFLECTION**

Overall the Capstone Office was pleased that the Capstone courses maintained the very strong quantitative scores that were achieved in 2013-14 where statistically significant improvement was documented in 28 items regarding teaching and learning in Capstones. It is impressive that the students report continued strong growth regarding the UNST goals, meaningful engagement in the community, and a deep sense that the community work improves their understanding of the course content. It was satisfying to see that zero of our Capstone courses that were assessed for the Communication (Writing) goal were inadequate and that 10 were adequate and 3 were exemplary.

**ACTION STEPS**

The Capstone Office will continue to work with an external diversity consultant to further support faculty’s capacity to improve our students’ experience reflecting on diversity issues related to the course content and community work in discipline–specific Capstones. The Capstone Office will also continue to nurture a strong relationship with the Office of Academic Innovation to support a Faculty in Residence for Online Community-Based Learning. That position will further our efforts to improve the student experience and learning in online Capstone courses.

The Capstone Program has been lauded nationally for its comprehensive approach to assessment including both our formative and our summative practices. This approach does indeed give our program the information needed to document student learning and employ effective faculty development for individual and programmatic improvement.

The primary expansion of assessment practices suggested for the 2015-16 academic year is a qualitative study involving our online Capstone students to better understand their experiences in Capstones. Now that we engage over 300 students per year in online courses, it is imperative that we better understand how they experience Capstones, what are their most important learnings, and document how we can improve those innovative courses.

The primary modification to our existing practices related to Capstone course portfolio process action steps where we intend to:

- Build in follow-up sessions to report out on and hear about shifts made to courses as a result of this process.
- Provide participants more details and specificity in the guidelines for portfolio submissions so that they might more carefully select assignments and artifacts in the future.