

Neumann University Core Experience

Capstone in the Majors



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Capstone in the Majors

Definition: A Capstone course is a culminating experience required for students nearing the end of their undergraduate academic studies. Within this course, students will produce a project that integrates and applies what they have learned. The project can be a research paper, professional portfolio, portfolio of “best work,” or an artistic expression of some sort. In addition, all Capstones will address the mission and philosophy of the University and the Core values of the University. Majors choose how to implement the Capstone. (Adapted from *A United Endeavor*, AACU, p. 34; & AAC&U documents).

Neumann University Core Experience Philosophy

The Neumann University Core Experience flows directly from the University’s mission as a liberal arts institution in the Catholic, Franciscan tradition and lies at the heart (*cor*) of the University itself. The campus community unites to impart the knowledge, skills, competencies and values that create opportunities for students to integrate faith and reason, grow in social responsibility, and prepare for personal and professional leadership roles in the local and global community.

Core Learning Outcomes

Active engagement in the Neumann University Core Experience, including credit-bearing courses and co-curricular activities, provides Neumann University graduates the opportunity to achieve the following learning outcomes.

Comprehension: Think critically, creatively, and analytically

Analyze and solve complex problems; demonstrate quantitative reasoning and scientific literacy; and explore the relationship of contemporary and historical events and issues.

Contemplation: Engage in meaningful reflection

Apply the principles and values of the Catholic Franciscan tradition to personal, professional, and societal questions and issues; engage in self-reflection; embrace life-long learning; discern career and vocational choices; and recognize and appreciate creative expression.

Conscience: Act ethically and responsibly

Demonstrate personal, professional, and academic honesty; accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions; engage as responsible members and leaders of diverse groups; and exercise ethical decision-making, informed by the Catholic Franciscan tradition, in a variety of settings.

Compassion: Respect all of creation

Honor the worth and dignity of each person; interact respectfully in the local and global community; engage in service to promote the common good; and demonstrate environmental awareness and stewardship.

Communication: Communicate effectively

Express ideas clearly and effectively in spoken and written form; use technology competently; and access, evaluate, cite, and credit information using accepted conventions.

Criteria for Capstone Courses

In consideration of the Core Philosophy and Learning Outcomes, the following criteria apply to all Capstones:

1. Assessment in the Capstone course will be guided by the Core Philosophy and Learning Outcomes.
2. Each major will have a Capstone experience for students during their final academic year (across the University and/or within majors) to engage students in reflection on the entire Neumann University experience.
3. The Capstone experience invites students to reflect on the entire undergraduate experience with emphasis on the chosen major and future career.
4. Capstones will have similarities but will be flexible to allow majors to make adaptations for their students and the needs of the program.
5. Each major program will implement the Capstone for their program(s).
6. Credit for the Capstone can range from 1 to 3 credits. (Capstones are not simply an “add-on”; rather they are stand-alone courses.) Divisions can decide whether they prefer all students to do the same Capstone project, or whether they will offer different options within a semester/cohort. All students in the major must be assessed in accordance with the Core Learning Outcomes.
7. All Capstones will utilize a Neumann University standard rubric adapted from appropriate AAC&U VALUE Rubrics, including Integrative Learning. Rubrics will be modified to meet course/discipline criteria and integration of the Catholic Franciscan mission and *RISES* values.
8. Capstones can be taught within the major by one or more faculty, or faculty across disciplines, and/or graduate students may help to teach the Capstone.
9. The University will offer workshops for education to the new Core, including the Capstone experience. Faculty will work within their major programs and with the Core Director to develop and implement a Capstone that is meaningful to the students.

Models for Capstones

Note: Major Programs will choose the model or combination of models that best meet the needs of their students. Divisions might find it helpful to discuss aspects of the Capstone models with the Core Director. Ideas for Capstones can be gleaned from the models or in conversation with the Core Director. The following models are meant as a guide for the process; however, modification and additions can be made in consultation with the Core Director. A program may already have something in place that can be tied into a Capstone project. Faculty are strongly encouraged to be creative in the design and development of Capstone projects. Any of these models may also be accomplished on an interdisciplinary level.

1. Students in Transition

The goals of this model focus on the student transitioning to a professional role. The Capstone project integrates the undergraduate experience with emphasis on future professional work. Capstone could be centered on portfolio development (including e-portfolio), a project within the major, and/or presentation to all levels of students within the major. Students integrate and apply learning from the core curriculum and major program. Emphasis is on the connection of the undergraduate experience to career planning/transition. Students will reflect on and evaluate their personal growth. This project can invite alumni to discuss their personal transitions and focus on issues such as mentoring, job search, continuing education, changes in education and/or licensure and/or other issues specific to the major. Alternatively, a program may choose to have the student developing the Capstone project serve as a mentor for a beginning student within the major.

2. Experiential Learning as a Capstone

The goal is to provide an experiential learning opportunity for completion of the Capstone. This can be within an existing course where there is an experiential activity, which then ties into the undergraduate experience. This Capstone can also encompass a study abroad, service, or Service-Learning experience. For example, if a program already has a study abroad type experience, faculty may be able to add onto this experience to create the Capstone. Although the Capstone can include a Service-Learning component, this cannot be the only place in the curriculum where Service-Learning is integrated into the major. This Capstone would be an additional Service-Learning experience.

3. Capstone Seminar

The goal is to explore significant questions or issues beyond those examined in other classes. In an interdisciplinary option, students from different majors will bring unique perspectives to an issue: e.g., health care reform- which includes health, financial, ethical, moral, and political implications. It is reasonable to consider that different majors will view the issues around health care reform or any major issue from different lenses. The seminar course will involve all parties in an in-depth investigation of relevant questions or issues. A research project can be a component of this Capstone; the end product will be determined in collaboration with course faculty. It is imperative that substantial interaction occurs between the students to foster deeper understanding and critical thinking from a variety of perspectives.

4. Campus Wide Capstone

This Capstone will most likely have an interdisciplinary focus; however, this Capstone can also be developed within the major. With awareness of the University theme for the entire campus, all seniors in their final semester could participate. For the theme for 2011-2012, students could have worked on projects related to service, with the identified community partners, in conjunction with faculty and other students. Course products could relate to the Neumann University theme of the year or an assigned book to be read by all faculty and staff each year. The common book would be available to students across all academic years; however, it would be a requirement for seniors in this Capstone experience. The goal is to explore a theme/topic throughout the semester, culminating in a University wide Capstone presentation day.

5. Collaboration with University Institutes

Students enrolled in this Capstone will collaborate with either the Neumann Institute for Franciscan Studies (NIFS) or the Institute for Sport, Spirituality, & Character Development (ISSCD). Personnel from the Institutes would help students to develop a research project, and provide support and resources to carry out the study. Because the Institutes can accommodate a limited number of students for this experience, students will need to demonstrate a commitment to the research process and a commitment to active and enthusiastic participation. A student intending to pursue graduate studies would be an ideal candidate for this type Capstone.

Bibliography

N.B. The following articles may be helpful in the development of a Capstone experience. The articles are a representative, not comprehensive, sample. All articles may be accessed through Neumann University Library databases.

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