

Senior Capstone Courses: Writing Gateways to Student Doing and Being

Yancey claims that “what we ask students to do is who we ask them to be” (2004). Carter additionally maintains that a discipline’s ways of doing is evident through its ways of knowing and of writing (2007). Balzhiser and McLeod clarify that the capstone course should provide students with ways of pulling together all that they have learned and applying it in some demonstrable way ideally with experiential learning and with a portfolio of work that can be presented for a job (2010). Capstone courses allow students to “thin slice” (Gladwell 2005) and articulate their academic experiences into meaningful exhibits and expressions of self.

Senior capstone writing courses, then, promote student doing and being through demonstrated knowledge and writing.

Student Doing. Senior capstone writing courses provide the culmination of theoretical approaches and applied work practice experiences into demonstrable experiential activities or formal portfolios—exhibiting what students do. Two overriding learning outcomes (Beyrelein 2004) evident in what students do are *competency* (snapshots of what learners can do at a specific point in time) and *achievement* (major work projects or performances within and outside the disciplinary field). These products or performances provide opportunities for students to integrate knowledge, capabilities, skills, and experiences into problem based learning, project based learning, program assessment, service learning, or virtual situated learning environments (Holdsworth 2009).

Student Being. Capstone writing courses also allow students to explore, practice, and develop academic and professional identities. Cooper maintains that rhetorical acts make writers who they are, and these acts affect their identity and performance (2011). Two principal learning outcomes (Beyrelein 2004) evident in students’ identities (being) are *movement* (awareness of improving skills and processes in different situations over time) and *experience* (changes in attitudes, values, and behaviors). Through senior capstone writing courses, students articulate and compose their identities “task by rhetorical task” (Yancey 2004).

This panel examines three senior capstone writing courses (two English and one business) to articulate learning outcomes that reflect student doing (competency and achievement outcomes) and student being (experience or movement outcomes).

Presenter 1: Senior Capstone Courses: Writing Gateways to Student Doing In and Outside the Discipline

The rhetorical studies seminar capstone course focuses on writing inside and outside the discipline meeting competency and achievement learning outcomes. This capstone experience emphasizes student doing through two major projects: class magazines created by multiple

section student editorial boards that issue calls for articles, peer review articles, and layout/design articles for electronic publication; and rhetorical discourse portfolios demonstrating expertise of personal, academic, professional, and public discourse.

Presenter 2: Senior Capstone Courses: Writing Gateways to Student Being and Ethical Judgments

The English senior writing and critical thinking seminar capitalizes on student identity satisfying movement and experience learning outcomes. This capstone experience requires academic and professional portfolios and a senior-level research project representing student experience, capability, ethics, and promise. These portfolios allow students to critically examine their education and create a stronger connection to what they have learned and where their education has taken them. Students also examine and define their experiences, values, and identities through ethical critical theory as they articulate who they are now and who they want to become.

Presenter 3: Senior Capstone Courses: Writing Gateways to Professional Discourse and Leadership

The business research and publishing seminar integrates student doing and identity through professional research projects and leadership development exhibiting competency, achievement, movement, and experience learning outcomes. This virtual situated learning capstone experience allows students to create class mock issues of *The Harvard Business Review* through student editorial boards. Students write, edit, design, and electronically publish business articles. Students additionally create individual professional and leadership portfolios demonstrating rhetorical and leadership skills, experiences, and identities.