

Memorandum

March 16, 2006

To: Ed.D Program Participants (007 Cohort)

From: James W. Guthrie (LPO Chair)
Claire Smrekar: K-12 Specialty Area Capstone Coordinator
John Braxton: Postsecondary Specialty Area Capstone Coordinator

Subject: Capstone Project Advisory

Neither you individually nor your prospective team members are responsible for generating your capstone project.

Following successful passage of your "Comprehensive Examination," your Specialty Area Capstone Coordinator (separate for K-12 and Postsecondary) will provide you with a descriptive list of potential projects around which you can organize your thoughts and begin to strategize regarding project pursuit, team composition, and timely completion.

The K-12 and postsecondary project lists will have resulted from Peabody faculty exchanges with schools and school districts from throughout the nation, postsecondary institutions and systems from around the United States, and other related agencies (e.g., philanthropic, private, state and federal).

You should explore two or three of the possible projects and then hold a conversation with your specialty area capstone advisor. The point of such conferring is to arrive at a definite project for you, or your project group.

Your capstone project places you and teammates in the role of an analyst-adviser-management consultant to the agency for which your project is intended. You will engage with individuals in that agency to ensure that you understand the desired "product." Ultimately, your client agency will also comment on the accuracy, utility, and professionalism of your capstone product for their organizational purposes.

Your "contract" with your capstone client agency will ensure that you have access to appropriate agency staff and information. Your Peabody Area Specialty Capstone Coordinator will act as your adviser and mentor in the process of undertaking your project.

Formats, analyses, data, recommendations, length, etc. will vary from project to project and little can be said in advance by way of standardized project content. However, projects will have to be completed and approved by early April of 2007 in order to ensure your Spring Semester doctoral program completion.

Rosie Moody will provide you with advice regarding registering for Capstone Project units. Added information regarding the capstone experience is appended to this memo and is also contained on the LPO Ed.D website.

Every reasonable effort will be extended to minimize additional participant expenses related to capstone projects.

Ed.D CAPSTONE PROJECT

Purpose

The capstone project is an opportunity for Ed.D program participants to bring to bear analytic abilities, professional understandings, contextual knowledge, and teamwork skills they have accumulated throughout the entire program and apply these capacities to a focused management consulting group project undertaken for a real world client.

A successfully completed capstone is another opportunity, in a realistic operational setting, for an Ed.D program participant to display his or her ability to master skills and understandings, synthesize these abilities across courses and readings, and apply what has been learned, both as an individual and as a team, to the management and improvement of operating educational and related organizations.

Eligibility and Schedule Logistics

A Peabody Ed.D program participant becomes eligible for capstone project status when he or she has successfully completed the comprehensive examination administered at the completion of the second year of Ed.D coursework.

A participant registers for three “Capstone Course Credits” distributed over the final fall and spring semester of the program. Capstone weekends occur three times. The first is in the final fall semester. The remaining two occur early and midway through the final spring semester.

Whereas these weekends are useful for collective purposes and individual face-to-face advising, they are no replacement for sustained and informed contact with capstone advisers and other faculty who may be assisting a participant throughout the final year. One cannot successfully complete the capstone by engaging with faculty only during the three-scheduled capstone weekends. The three weekends is, nevertheless, an integral part of capstone guidance and should not be forgone by a participant.

The three weekends may be construed as follows:

Fall Semester:

Weekend 1: introduction of the problem/ assignment/ clients; discussion of the project components; team and individual meetings, work assignments

Spring semester:

Weekend 2: status report by teams or individual and faculty feedback

Weekend 3: presentation of reports

Capstone Dynamics

The Leadership, Policy, and Organizations department has two capstone faculty advisors, one specializing in postsecondary matters and the other in K-12 organizations. On occasion, a project may not fit neatly into these compartments, and an accommodation will be made with, perhaps, yet another LPO faculty adviser. Also, depending upon the particular details of an individual capstone project, other LPO, Peabody, or Vanderbilt faculty may become part of the advising and mentoring team

Ed.D program participants are not expected to generate capstone projects or to identify operational clients for whom they will conduct management studies. Indeed, the opposite is the case. Peabody consciously and systematically generates capstone opportunities from a spectrum of external (and possibly internal to Vanderbilt) operating institutions and government agencies.

Each year, capstone advisers engage in exchanges with operating schools, districts, postsecondary institutions and systems, state agencies, philanthropic organizations, and private sector firms to determine interests in having a matter of policy or operational significance subjected to analytic scrutiny by an advanced Ed.D program participant. The resulting "Requests for Assistance" [RFAs] from bidding external and internal agencies are screened for their applicability and fit for the Peabody Ed.D. program. The final set of RFAs are compiled and provided to appropriate sets of Ed.D. participants.

This process of identifying and distilling capstone opportunities is repeated each year. There is no standing list of capstone projects. It is a dynamic process, each project being a function of real-time, real-life organizational needs.

Peabody capstone advisers will cooperate with participants to construct teams suitable for a project.

Peabody faculty capstone advisers confer frequently with the team, and where needed with individuals, providing guidance and advice, and acting as a mentor, much as would occur in a management consulting firm with new employees. Additionally, program project participants engage with actors from the client agency. The client agency agrees, as part of the RFA process, to provide team member access to appropriate people and information. Depending upon the project itself, one or more Peabody or Vanderbilt faculty may also be engaged in an advising and mentoring capacity.

A collective project team involving up to three program participants is the expected norm. "Free riding" will be rigorously monitored. Hence, steps must be taken in advance to ensure fairness and visibility for each project team participant's contribution.

The completed project is approved by a faculty capstone adviser (separate for K-12 and postsecondary specialty participants), appropriate client supervisors, and a third Peabody faculty member specified in advance.

Illustrative Capstone Projects

The following items and descriptions are intended solely for illustrative purposes.

Design a teacher pay for performance compensation program for the state of Wisconsin;

Evaluate a school district's or school's grading policy and make recommendations

for an alternative student performance appraisal system;

Complete a case study of education alignment between Tennessee's K-12 systems, its two-year community college system and its four year college system;

Develop an educational and training program for incarcerated youth in Chicago, IL;

Submit a feasibility study (including a cost benefit analysis) for the Des Moines school system to expand the school choice program;

Design an evaluation of supplemental educational services for schools failing to meet AYP benchmarks in Nashville.

Illustrative Postsecondary Capstone project:

Enrollment management analysis for a small institution, focusing on costs associated with admitting various kinds of students (e.g., students with interests in sciences and engineering, students with low SAT scores, students with learning disabilities, students from faraway states, students with no financial need, students of especially high academic ability, etc.). Often, admitted students don't enroll, meaning a space was reserved for someone and it could have gone to someone else. When admitted students do enroll, they follow different paths, sometimes requiring extraordinary faculty and staff attention and thus more costs.

Understanding costs associated with different kinds of admitters can be useful exercise for institutions, pointing toward effective, efficient policies. Such a project could be separated into individual project parts in several ways for participating team members (e.g., in the one above, one student could focus on admit tees who do not come and those who come late or under otherwise unusual circumstances; one student could focus on use of campus services by students with different backgrounds; one student could focus on major-choice patterns among students and how those relate to institutional costs).

International Capstone projects can easily be an overseas analog to any of the above-listed illustrative topics.

Project Expectations

Each capstone project will be approximately 75 pages, and include multiple sections, depending upon project particulars, such as) contextual analysis of the problem; 2) data analysis (e.g., financial, operational, evaluative, demographic); 3) program recommendations; 4) implementation strategy; 5) cost benefit and evaluation plan; 6) conclusions; 7) appendices; 8) references.

Capstone reports will have to be undertaken to a uniform Peabody format rendering the final version acceptable for library storage, reader access, and electric retrieval.

Capstone Progression

A participant discusses prospective client projects with and gains formal approval from faculty capstone specialty area adviser. Thereafter, a project work plan is constructed and mutually discussed that contains data needs, information and interview logistics, and time lines, anticipated effort distributions, report outlines, related studies (if any) and deliverable descriptions and schedules.

How Capstone Project Compares with Conventional PhD Dissertation

Conventional Peabody PhD Dissertation	Peabody Ed.D Capstone Project Expectations
Derived from or intended to contribute to theoretical explanations or concentrated upon policy problem of substantial state, national, or institutional significance	Derived from client interests and intended to address operational issues. May or may not be theory based.
Requiring approval of four person faculty committee, one of whom is drawn from outside department	Capstone Adviser and Client Approval
Intended as cumulative contribution to knowledge, grounded in prior research and relevant literature	Present day, client oriented, problem centered orientation
Vanderbilt University Graduate School authority and function	Peabody authority and function
Five chapter or three publishable paper format	Management Consultant report format
Academic or scholarly in orientation and format	Practically oriented and client centered
Analytically rigorous	Analytically rigorous
Intended as a component of Professional Portfolio and helpful to career advancement	Intended as a component of Professional Portfolio and helpful to career advancement