

General Education Senior Capstone Course Alternative B

Below is a second version of a senior capstone course, entirely different and much more conventional than the version sent out two weeks ago. This version features a capstone experience that would typically be three credits. It could be within the major (if major faculty so decide) or in a cross-disciplinary version with few or limited pre-requisites. It would be a place for “pulling together and assessment” of general education goals, within a disciplinary/professional context (for departments where that’s appropriate) or more broadly (for majors where faculty agree that a broader senior experience would be useful).

Rationale: Faculty and others responsible for higher education can normally reach fairly easy agreement on the elements of learning that college graduates should possess; those elements get translated, at UND and elsewhere, into lists of goals for general education. Employers of new college graduates generally agree with educators regarding the importance of these goals. It makes sense, therefore, when students are nearing graduation, to provide one final opportunity to integrate and reinforce all or most of the university’s general education goals, either in a professional context or in an area of student interest and choice, depending on what’s appropriate for a given major. For students who complete a significant portion of their coursework outside of UND, this also becomes a final opportunity for the university to emphasize its own particular set of goals and broader intellectual values as a significant piece within students’ education.

Purpose: The General Education Senior Capstone course is a final opportunity, at the senior level, to reinforce UND’s general education goals. It provides students with learning activities directly related to general education goals but in a discipline-specific context appropriate to their career goals, or in another context of the student’s own choice.

Criteria for Course Validation: In order to be validated as fulfilling the general education capstone requirement, faculty must demonstrate that the course meets the following requirements.

1. Students must have completed 100 credits or be within 25 credits of graduation prior to enrollment in the capstone course. Any exceptions would need to be approved with a dean’s signature.
2. Learning activities designed for the class will provide students with opportunities to make progress toward at least [3 out of 4??] of UND’s general education goals.
3. For new validations, faculty must demonstrate how they intend to conduct direct assessment of student learning related to [3 out of 4??] of UND’s general education goals; for revalidations, evidence and analysis of actual goal achievement (and, if goal achievement is at a level deemed unsatisfactory to the faculty member, discussion of plans for redressing the problem in future iterations of the course) must be provided.
4. Since these are capstone courses, both learning activities and goal achievement should clearly be at an “outcome” level for students completing a university

degree, rather than at an introductory level, as might be appropriate in lower division general education courses.

5. General education capstone courses should be broadening, integrative, or interdisciplinary. This can occur across various branches of a single field in a discipline-specific capstone, or it can occur across multiple fields in a cross-disciplinary or interdisciplinary capstone.

Considerations:

1. If UND adopts a capstone proposal that includes the possibility of a non-major capstone of either sort (based on the first capstone option or on this “option B”), we strongly recommend that a website be developed so that students can search independently for qualifying capstone options rather than being totally dependent on options recommended to them by an advisor.
2. With any new course proposal (especially for any course counting for general education), questions get raised about how this is paid for or how faculty time gets “counted.” Joey Benoit, dean and member of our sub-committee, suggests that answering these questions is ultimately a job for the Council of Deans. If no faculty are allocated time for teaching these courses, they cannot exist and the requirement would need to be rescinded. But if this proposal is adopted, the deans will help ensure that teaching capstone courses (and any other new course additions to the program) becomes part of load in one fashion or another.
3. It’s important to note that students currently complete a 39 credit general education program, so while this would be a “new” course, enough credits to make it possible are already offered. It might require reallocation but not large infusions of new monies or positions.
4. Any proposal for something “new” (see #3 above!) makes people nervous about what it might replace. Focusing on what might be lost as a first line of discussion would likely lead to a discipline-protective, stay-the-course sort of mentality – which we’ve been trying to avoid. So we argue for making a decision about the capstone on its merits, and worrying about how all the pieces fit together once we’ve agreed on the features a really good plan should contain.