

Exploring Creative Honours and Capstone Projects

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Aim and context

Our aim is to help transform institutional practices and assessment strategies through creative solutions for developing alternative and additional honours and capstone projects to meet the needs of students from different backgrounds, different subjects and different kinds of institution.

The Honours Dissertation is the traditional undergraduate capstone project undertaken by the majority of students in the UK and is often seen as the gold-standard. It provides an excellent apprenticeship for students wishing to undertake research degrees, but with increasing student diversity and growth of professional disciplines, it does not necessarily provide for all students and employers' needs.

In the UK our focus is on creative projects at honours level which may be an alternative or additional to the traditional honours dissertation; in many other countries our interest is in creative final year and capstone projects which include a significant element of research or inquiry.

We are particularly interested in innovative ways of:

- engaging students in research, inquiry and consultancy, including projects which are employment and community based;
- assessing the projects and ensuring consistency of challenge and standards; and
- disseminating the findings, including through exhibitions, undergraduate research conferences and other forms of public engagement.

Invitation

As part of a national funded (NTFS) project the University of Gloucestershire is collecting interesting examples of how universities in the UK and internationally are designing and assessing creative honours and capstone projects. If you have an interesting example please contact Mick Healey (mhealey@glos.ac.uk) and see the proforma at: [//insight.glos.ac.uk/tli/activities/ntf/creativehops/pages/default.aspx](http://insight.glos.ac.uk/tli/activities/ntf/creativehops/pages/default.aspx)



"Oh, what the heck — why not a dissertation on 'Baywatch'?"

Examples

Engaging students in applied research through a community sports development consultancy project at University of Central Lancashire, UK

The final year Community Sports Development module acts as a capstone module for Sports Coaching students which is taken in addition to the honours dissertation. Students work as a project team through a consultancy brief with a partner agency and recommend strategies that can be employed to support community development through community sport and coaching initiatives. There are normally 8-12 consultancy briefs divided up among the 40-50 students, with students creating their own consultancy teams. Examples include: a) A "health check" of football refereeing in Blackburn; b) Community Sport and Crime Reduction; and c) Community Sport ("Street Dance"). Source: [//resources.glos.ac.uk/ceal/resources/casestudiesactivelearning/undergraduate/index.cfm](http://resources.glos.ac.uk/ceal/resources/casestudiesactivelearning/undergraduate/index.cfm)

Modelling the research experience: tourism students' virtual conference at University of Lincoln, UK

In May every year, final-year Tourism students at the University of Lincoln participate in a live virtual conference. This is part of their assessment for the semester-long unit. Students submit a full conference paper, but it is only a summary that appears on the conference web site. During the specified timeframe of one week, students can participate at any time. Each student is also required to post a comment on another conference paper. Source: www.cometravel.lincoln.ac.uk

Senior Capstone at Portland State University, US

During the final year each undergraduate student is required to participate in a Senior Capstone, the culmination of the University Studies program. The Senior Capstone is a community-based learning experience that a) provides an opportunity for students to apply the expertise they have learned in their major to real issues and problems in the community; and b) Enhances students ability to work in a team context necessitating collaboration with persons from different fields of specialization. Each student works with a team of students and faculty. Each Senior Capstone must result in some form of summation, closing project, or final product that puts closure to the students' experience. Source: www.oirp.pdx.edu/portweb/published_pages/prototype/themes/cp/capstone/

Key characteristics

- Projects which students undertake towards the end of their undergraduate degree usually in their final or senior year
- Students engage in a significant amount of independent research or inquiry ('matching' the conceptions of 'research' in their discipline)
- Wider than the traditional honours dissertation (typically an independent piece of research presented as an 8-10,000 word extended essay) in their:
 - conception (e.g. collaborative projects as part of a research group; consultancy projects);
 - function (e.g. synthesising capstone projects; preparatory projects for transition into a profession);
 - form (e.g. student group projects);
 - location (e.g. employer and community based projects); and/or
 - how they are disseminated (e.g. through exhibitions, undergraduate research conferences and other forms of public engagement)



Project dimensions

Additional to honours project	Alternative to honours project
Campus based	Employer / community based
Undertaken at the University	Distance learning
Research preparation	Professional / employment preparation
Student learning centred	Outcome product centred
Discipline based	Multi- or interdisciplinary
Student initiated	Teacher / supervisor initiated
Individual	Group
Original to the student	Original to the discipline
University audience	Professional / public audience
Emphasising in-depth analysis	Emphasising synthesis of knowledge / skills
Assessed by academics	Assessed by peers / professionals
Individual supervision	Group / peer supervisions

Biology start up business final year project, University of Durham, UK

Biology Enterprise is a collaborative venture between Durham Business School and the School of Biological and Biomedical Sciences. The module is project-orientated with self-selecting groups of students who generate an idea for a business opportunity that is based on a scientific discovery. Students use their knowledge and understanding of science to develop and research their idea into a technology that can be readily commercialised e.g. a diabetes breath tester, a biodegradable chewing gum. In parallel, the Business School teaches students the necessary skills and knowledge required to develop their idea into a successful business.

Source: ftp://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/events/dur05/przyborski.pdf

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Dissertation run