

capstone guidelines

GEN 411
(Erion)

overview

As you know, your primary assignment for this course is “[T]he production, presentation, and defense of a research paper that addresses a specific academic topic related to the College’s General Education Core.” This process began, of course, with the production and defense of your *proposal* in GEN 410; in GEN 411, you will complete this process by producing:

- a *prospectus* (a document combining an outline, a bibliography, and several other important developmental elements);
- a series of *rough drafts*, and;
- a *final draft* accompanied by an *oral defense* presentation.

By working in small teams on each of these component assignments, you should be able to establish the disciplined timetable needed to succeed with such a significant and rewarding project.

topics, research questions, theses, and arguments

Since the Capstone paper is a serious research project, you should organize your work around not only a broad and interdisciplinary *topic*, but also a specific and substantial *thesis* that answers a central *research question* within your chosen topic area.* You have a significant degree of freedom to choose your topic and thesis, of course, though you might consider adopting one of the strategies below when making these choices:

- revisit a problem or idea introduced in GEN 110, GEN 220, GEN 230, GEN 240, or GEN 410, but explore it in greater detail, and in an interdisciplinary manner;
- explore in an interdisciplinary manner a problem related to the General Education Core’s mission or goals (as presented in the *Academic Undergraduate Catalog*);
- explore connections between a problem or idea related to your major and the General Education Core’s mission or goals. (Note that it is *not* enough to simply study, say, some technical problem in computer science; however, you may be able to generate an acceptable project by studying a *related* problem with significant links to the liberal arts and sciences.)

The bulk of your Capstone paper should be devoted to developing a coherent, cogent, and compelling *argument* that provides *evidence sufficient to establish your thesis*. The strength and clarity of your argument will be the most important factors in your paper’s evaluation; thus, your paper should be *focused, balanced, and logical*.

* Note: a *thesis* is typically a single sentence that expresses the main point or central claim of a research paper.

prospectus

Your first task will be to prepare and present (within your work team) a *prospectus* that summarizes the major components of your research plan. Since the prospectus will share elements of the proposal that you developed in GEN 410, I would recommend that you return to your GEN 410 proposal and review your instructor's comments before you begin developing your prospectus. I would also recommend that you follow the suggested format for the prospectus, but whatever format you choose, be sure that your prospectus includes both a draft *outline* of your paper and a working *bibliography* (in proper MLA or APA style) broken down into the following sections:

- sources *already read* (including books, articles, online resources, etc.);
- sources *not yet read*;
- sources *identified, but not yet acquired*.

Satisfactory participation during the prospectus peer review workshops (a significant component of your final grade for the course) will require that you:

- *bring copies of your prospectus for everyone* (including your instructor) on the scheduled date of your review;
- *provide constructive feedback on the prospectuses of your team members* during peer review.

drafts

As your project unfolds, your team will meet to review rough drafts of your paper. Please note that a rough draft need not be a complete rendering of your entire paper; rather, the idea is to give your team a chance to sample a section or two of the paper and thereby evaluate your progress. (I would also recommend that you submit updated copies of your outline, bibliography, etc. with your drafts to help with this evaluation.) Satisfactory participation during the draft peer review workshops (again, a significant component of your final grade) will require that you:

- *submit printed or emailed copies of your rough drafts to everyone* (including your instructor) *at least 72 hours before a scheduled review*;
- *provide constructive feedback on the rough drafts of your team members* during peer review.

Your final draft in the 25-30 page range (double-spaced with one-inch margins on all four sides, a 12- or 14-point font, and a single staple in the upper left-hand corner) is due on the date of your defense.

defense

The defense is an oral presentation that:

- introduces your *topic* and related *research questions*;
- *reviews your thesis and main lines of argument*;
- *summarizes your investigation* and its results, and;
- *invites questions* from your audience.

Please feel free to use the blackboard, handouts, etc., to make your presentation effective, and be sure to speak clearly, using notes if necessary. The defense should last 15-20 minutes, including at least 5-10 minutes for questions. We will determine the defense schedule during the coming weeks.

Finally, you should note that audience presence and participation will be especially important during the defenses. Thus, *I expect everyone to attend and participate during the defenses at the end of the semester*. I will also give special weight (positive or negative) to such activity when calculating the participation component of your final grade.

other points to remember

- There is less formal structure in GEN 411 than in most other undergraduate courses, but it is still a three-credit course, and so you should expect to *devote at least as much time and effort to your research project each week as you would to any other upper-division course*.
- Booth, Colomb, and Williams' *The Craft of Research* is a great guide to a major research project like this one; preview the book before you begin (if you have not done so already), and refer to it regularly throughout your project.
- Hacker's *A Pocket Style Manual* is a wonderful reference for not only grammar, mechanics, and stylistic issues, but also source citations in both the MLA and APA systems; if you can develop the habit of collecting bibliographic information early and in the proper format, your "Works Cited" or "References" section will be relatively simple to prepare.
- *You are not in this alone*; use your team (or perhaps a partner from within your team) for encouragement, support, and guidance, whether in weekly or bi-weekly meetings (on- or off-campus), telephone or e-mail correspondence, etc. Remember, too, that librarians are always willing and able to help with research projects, as are the tutors in the Academic Skills Center and the General Education faculty members.
- No doubt, your Capstone project will be a substantial undertaking, but if you are able to establish and maintain a regular schedule of research and writing, you will be rewarded with a tremendous learning experience and a paper that you can be proud of. *Good luck!*