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Capstone Courses in Mass Communication Programs

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Abstract

Many colleges and universities emphasize helping students make the transition into higher education. But transition to post-graduation life through approaches such as capstone courses has not received much attention. A survey of mass communication programs indicated that capstones are commonly used for both integration of prior learning and for transition to what students may face after graduation, and that mass communication programs appear to be meeting the challenge of blending these somewhat incongruous approaches. Mass communication capstones employ a wide variety of methods and content, but teachers and administrators appear satisfied with how the courses serve their programs. The survey's results are interpreted with suggestions for achieving more consistency in mass media capstones.

Introduction

As college educators, we like to believe that our students come to us more or less as children and leave, more or less, as adults. Although this generalization doesn't fit all cases – the number of adult or non-traditional students is ever-rising – it works as a broad statement about what college is supposed to accomplish. Students enter the undergraduate institution unprepared for life beyond it, and they should graduate better prepared.

Many colleges and universities manage the transition *into* higher education with freshman seminars, learning communities and the like. But far less attention has been paid to the back-end transition of students from their senior year in college into the post-graduate world of work or graduate school.[1] In particular there has been little academic research on transitional or summative experiences of students from mass communication programs. Researchers from other fields of study have explored this, including special forums on capstone courses in sociology[2] and in speech/general communication[3] that were published by journals in those disciplines a few years ago.

But nothing of a similar nature was found in the mass communication literature, aside from some work on capstone experiences and campaigns courses in public relations programs.[4] This realization led to a two-fold research design presented here: (1) a review of the literature and theory behind capstone courses in general to help determine what a mass communication capstone might look like and what purposes it might serve, coupled with (2) a survey of department chairs and teachers of mass communication capstone courses to investigate whether the theory matched the reality in such courses across the discipline.

Literature review

  Definitions, history and context. Capstone courses have been defined as "summative curricular approaches"[5] and "a culminating experience in which students are expected to integrate, extend, critique and apply the knowledge gained in the major."[6] A major impetus for higher education institutions to develop and implement capstones was curricular reform in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A 1985 report from the Association of American Colleges recommended more in-depth study through curricular tools such as capstones.[7] The push for colleges and universities to engage in more systematic program assessment also drove the development of capstones because they can be effective tools for assessment.[8] Redmond, for example, outlines the different types of assessments higher educational institutions undertake and describes how capstone-course projects can provide outcome assessment, [9] while Decker portrays how a course in communication theory was altered to make it a capstone course with assessment purposes in mind.[10] An Illinois college created a new seminar-style course for the same assessment purpose.[11] Schilling and Schilling in fact put the capstone course at the center of assessment efforts:

   Increasingly, departments and programs are using senior capstone experiences as a
   central component of their assessment activities. The capstone is intended to provide an
   opportunity for students to integrate their experiences in the full range of courses in the
   major (or entire curriculum). Thus, the work done in the capstone – the products
   generated, or the process engaged – should provide a reasonable reflection on the
   adequacy of students' preparation in the program.[12]

While the capstone may have value as an assessment tool, most schools would not have one for that reason alone. The course also must have some intrinsic value for the students who enroll in it. The general view of capstone courses is that they should help to "bring coherence and closure" [13] as well as "synthesis"[14] to the curriculum. "The capstone provides seniors the opportunity to bring their specialized knowledge and breadth of experience to bear on perennial issues and questions."[15] "Consolidation" is another function, especially when the major is constructed mostly of electives taken in no particular sequence.[16] The capstone should offer students an opportunity to demonstrate the full spectrum of their learning with integrated projects and give students an integrated view of the communication discipline.[17] It is often focused on exploration and self-directed learning that "requires students to take a greater portion of the responsibility for their education."[18]

An end or a beginning? The literature on capstones, however, reflects a tension in the philosophy that underlies them. The traditional embodiment of such courses – as reflected in the definitions and descriptions above – is backward-looking, seeking to summarize and integrate previous study. But at the same time, educators wonder whether a culminating experience for students should be more forward looking. As one researcher put it "Should a capstone course 'cap' the undergraduate experience, or should it function as a bridge to the world beyond college?" [19] Similarly, Cos and Ivy distinguish between a capstone, which they see as a culmination of prior experiences, and an "exit" course focused on things such as job preparation.[20]

But Heinemann argues that a culminating course ought to offer both closure on past material *and* exploration of new topics that help students reach beyond their present knowledge. "Ideally we should be able to enter into both intellectual consolidation and expansion in the

senior capstone course," he wrote. [21] Capstones also can be seen as a "rite of passage"[22] that is both forward- and backward-looking, an opportunity for students to learn how theories apply to practical settings[23] and a socialization agent to what students will face in the work world.[24]

Approaches such as these, which emphasize transition, help in meeting the special needs of graduating seniors including the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of college, integration and closure for their college careers, and support for their transition to post-college life.[25] But there is a danger in doing this, according to Heinemann, because when a course is too tightly packed "in trying to cover so many topics, nothing [is] really done well." [26] He further notes that "If the practical is overemphasized, the capstone may become petty or superficial."

Course design: goals and purposes. Capstone courses' rationale and purposes reflect this dichotomy. But courses also cannot be pigeonholed as one or the other; they are as diverse as the institutions that offer them and the faculty that teach them. In examining the research on capstones, several prominent themes emerge:

- Integration. The most common terms used to depict capstones courses are integration and synthesis; a majority of the works cited in this research use one or both terms in describing what a capstone course should accomplish. In this context, integration means pulling together prior learning either within the major[27] or connecting the major with general education.[28] Such integration puts learning (rather than teaching) at the core of the capstone experience and can be used to help students understand the breadth of communication as a discipline.[29] The act of integrating knowledge from across their years of study can help students achieve a sense of closure on their college experience.[30]

- Application. Another theme is that the capstone should help students apply what they have learned, especially the application of theory to real-world situations through such

means as case studies .[31] In-class learning also can be used to create to situations that seek to integrate knowledge of interpersonal and organizational communication.[32]

- Transition. Gardner and Van der Veer make the argument that educators must pay greater attention to helping college seniors prepare for what lies beyond.[33] An applied project or experience can help students make that transition from the classroom to the larger world.[34] When capstone courses address career issues, students get a better understanding of the relevance of what they have learned in school and how it can be applied.[35]

- Other less-frequently mentioned – but still significant – topics or purposes for capstone courses include extension of knowledge,[36] opportunities for in-depth study,[37] reinforcement or extension of basic communication competencies,[38] and development of "higher-order" or critical thinking skills.[39]

Course design: assignments. With such a wide range of potential purposes, it is not surprising that design strategies for capstone courses are correspondingly disparate. Many of the articles that were reviewed, in fact, were "profiles" of a specific course at a specific institution. But even still, some common themes emerge. Integration and synthesis can be achieved through projects such as a senior thesis or an extensive research-based project within the context of a course, and many of the course descriptions include such an assignment. Studying and applying theory is another typical approach. Seminar-style learning, where the instructor is more of a facilitator and the focus is on students learning from each other, is another common strategy in capstone courses. Less-common strategies – but ones mentioned in at least some research articles – were examinations (including comprehensive exams), portfolios, and outside experiences such as a "service learning" project.[40] None of these approaches are mutually exclusive, of course, with the possible exception of the thesis, which in many cases would stand alone as a capstone

experience outside of a course context. But within a standard course framework, research projects and seminar discussion could certainly be based on theory. A course could incorporate a variety of assignments that address different topics, all contributing to the final grade.

 Course design: Logistical considerations. A capstone, by definition, exists as part of the students' academic program. Descriptions of how it fits and how it is administered also reflect a variety of approaches regarding how much credit it should bear, whether it should have specific prerequisites, how it should be taught (and by whom), and whether it should be mandatory. Some of the literature addresses these issues in ways that amount to checklists for creating a capstone course.[41] But one author took a more prescriptive approach, saying the capstone should be (a) required and graded; (b) done as a seminar in small groups, preferably fewer than 15 students; (c) seen as a joint responsibility by all faculty in a program; and (d) possibly used as an assessment tool, though he doesn't see that as mandatory.[42] Gardner and Van de Veer also recommend a mandatory capstone course for all majors.[43]

 Discussion of literature. From the literature, it is clear that a mass communication capstone could include many things and be approached in various ways. But the general trends regarding capstone courses provide some guidelines for constructing such a course. The mass communication capstone should include a focus on integrating past knowledge from across the curriculum, both to reinforce that learning and to encourage use of prior knowledge to gain new insights. It might be most productive as a small-group seminar with a focus on self-directed learning. It would be reasonable for such a course to include the study of theory, perhaps as the basis of a research project or incorporated into application-oriented assignments that show how theory can relate to real-world phenomena. It also would be logical for the course to include some sense of what students will face after graduation. It could be used as a part of program

assessment, even as a guide for revision of the curriculum in the courses preceding it. It could –

some authors say it *should* – be a credit-bearing, graded course at least equal in weight to other

courses in the major.

Methods

This composite picture of capstones drawn from the literature was used to create an 18-

question survey focused on program demographics, course content, teaching and assessment

methods, and satisfaction with the course. It was administered online and consisted primarily of

closed-ended questions that respondents could select with a click of the mouse. Several of the

questions included an "other" selection accompanied by space for an open-ended response so

respondents could explain their approach when they felt the range of choices did not fit their

situation. (See Appendix A.)

A pre-test of the questionnaire determined that it took five minutes or less to complete,

exclusive of time spent on the open-ended questions. Deans, department chairs and program

directors of all schools and departments of journalism listed in the 2004-2005 AEJMC directory

were contacted by e-mail and asked to follow a link in the e-mail to complete the survey. This

approach, more census than sample, resulted in a contact pool of 438 individuals, who were e-

mailed in July 2005 and again in September 2005.

Findings

A total of 176 valid responses were received, for a response rate of 40.2%. Taking into

account a finite population correction factor (given that 40% of the total population was

surveyed), the margin of error for the survey was $\pm$5.7 percentage points with a 95% confidence

level.[44] The respondents included department or division chairs (98 respondents, or 55.7%),

capstone instructors (17 respondents, or 9.7%), and individuals who serve as both chairs and

capstone instructors (32 respondents, or 18.2%). Another 29 respondents (16.5%) could not be

categorized because they didn't answer the question. Many of them may have simply overlooked

it, however, when they entered a response to the first question indicating they did not have a

capstone and submitted the survey at that point without answering further questions.

General trends: The survey results indicate that capstone courses are popular among

mass communication and journalism programs, with 79.5% of respondents (140 of 176) saying

their department, school or program offers one. These were almost evenly divided between

experiences that "cap" an entire program (44.3%, or 62 of the 140 that offer a capstone) and

courses that serve a single unit or division within the program (42.9%, or 60 of 140). The

remaining 18 respondents (12.9%) categorized their course as something other than one of those

choices. Nearly all programs that offer a capstone – 133 of the 140, or 95% – require it. Two-

thirds of them (66.4%; n = 93) offer it every semester, quarter or trimester while the remaining

third offer it once a year; no programs reported offering it less frequently. So capstones clearly

play a prominent role in many programs. Survey respondents also seem pleased with how their

courses are going, with more than 90% categorizing themselves as either very satisfied (48.9%;

n = 65) or somewhat satisfied (41.4%; n = 55) with the course.

There also appears to be an effort to keep class sizes small enough to provide a seminar-

type environment. A substantial majority of the programs (72.1%; n = 98) reported class sizes of

20 or fewer students, while another 19.9% (n = 29) said class sizes ranged from 21 to 30

students. Only 8.1% (n = 11) of programs reported class sizes larger than 30, despite the fact that

62% (n = 85) of the programs reported having 31 or more students take the course each year and

nearly 15% (n = 20) have more than 100 students enrolling. Faculty tend to share the load of these courses, with only 28.8% (n = 40) of programs reporting that the capstone was a sole faculty member's responsibility. "Shared responsibility," such as different colleagues teaching different sections, was the most popular response to this question, with 50% (n = 70) of all programs that have capstones reporting that as their model. In 15% of the programs a particular teacher has primary responsibility and others contribute to the course.

Whole-program vs. unit capstones: Because some courses serve an entire program while others cover some subset of the program – and because the survey was so evenly split between courses serving these populations – the researchers wondered whether instructional goals, course content or teaching methods might differ between courses serving these differing purposes. By and large, they did not; statistically significant differences between the two were found only with (a) one of the four teaching methods that respondents could use to describe their courses; and (b) with one of the nine types of assignments that respondents could select as being included in their courses. All other responses to those two questions (which were "check all that apply" responses) were not statistically different between the groups. No significant differences were found between responses from whole-program capstones and unit capstones with any other questions, either. So except where indicated, the findings to follow are based on all of the 140 programs that have capstones rather than any subset of them.

Course purposes, teaching, content and assignments: Integration of prior learning was the most commonly listed purpose for the course, with 90% of respondents (n = 126 out of 140) citing it as a course rationale. Helping students make the transition out of college was listed as a purpose by 55% (n = 77) of respondents while 50% (n = 70) said the course is also used for program assessment. The numbers total more than 100% because respondents could list multiple

purposes, and in fact 30.7% (n = 43) of the respondents listed all three purposes as rationales for their courses and 36.4% (n = 51) listed two of the three. An additional 15.7% (n = 22) of the programs listed "other" rationales including production of student portfolios, instruction in ethics and giving students an opportunity for a substantial individual project.

As with the course purposes, the teaching methods used to approach the capstone vary, with two or three different teaching strategies generally being used (mode = 3). Discussion ranks as the most popular method, cited by 72.9% (n = 102) of the respondents. Lecture is used by 45% (n = 63) of the respondents, group presentations by 55.7% (n = 78) and lab or studio work by 53.8% (n = 75) of all respondents. Use of lab or studio work was one of those two areas in which overall capstone courses and unit-specific ones differed. Such instruction is used in 75% (n = 45 out of 60) of the unit capstones but only 32.3% (n = 20 out of 62) of the time in overall courses, a statistically significant difference (Chi^2 = 20.69, 1 d.f.; p $\leq$ .0001). An additional 20% (n = 28) of respondents reported assorted other teaching approaches including development of communication campaigns, creation of portfolios, individual coaching, and group and individual presentations to the class.

Like course rationales and teaching methods, content areas covered by the courses reflect a smorgasbord approach with a modal value of five different areas included and only one of these areas surpassing 60 percent. Research (63.8%; n = 89), theory (59.3%; n = 83), and ethics (57.1%; n = 80) were ranked as the most popular areas for course content. Other prevalent areas include media-and-society issues (50.7%; n = 71), media workplace issues (50%; n = 70) and career exploration (48.6%; n = 68). Less common but still relatively frequently covered topics include leadership (40.7%; n = 57), media law (29.3%; n = 41), media economics (24.3%; n = 34), and integration with the liberal arts (29.3%; n = 41). Slightly more than 24% (n = 34) of

respondents selected "other" as a content area. Common themes within the open-ended descriptions of these areas included application of theory, principles and skills; production of hands-on projects and portfolios; and other individually selected projects.

Perhaps reflecting the variety of rationales, teaching methods and content areas, the nature of assignments students are required to complete also covered a wide range of approaches, with generally three to four different types of assignments required. The most common of these are individual presentations, required in 68.6% (n = 96) of the courses, and original research projects, which are required 62.1% (n = 87) of the time. Also, 63.6% (n = 89) of respondents reported factoring attendance and participation into the grade. Group presentations were popular among unit capstones, used in 63.3% (n = 38 out of 60) of those courses, but far less common among program-wide courses, used just 38.7% (n = 24 out of 62) of the time there. As with the lab and studio work as teaching strategies, this was a statistically significant difference between the two types of capstone courses (Chi^2 = 6.45, 1 d.f.; p = .011). Other, less-used devices included practica or field work (38.6% of the time; n = 54), in-class exams (34.2%; n = 48), quizzes (19.3%; n = 27), graded seminar discussions (14.3%; n = 20), and take-home exams (7.9%; n = 11). About 23% (n = 32) of respondents reported offering other assessment methods, including productions, portfolios and creation of communication campaigns.

Discussion

These results must be interpreted in light of some methodological limitations, notably that the survey did not control for the level of the respondent with respect to the course, which could affect results reported by schools or large departments with multiple programs and multiple capstones. Post-hoc testing indicated little difference between unit and whole-program

capstones. But in the survey itself, a dean or department chair who oversees several capstones might have responded with answers relevant to some of the courses but not to all of them. It also is possible that multiple responses were received from some institutions, especially in multiple-capstone situations in which an administrator might have forwarded the survey link to various individuals responsible for unit courses. The survey collection software did not control for or even track any such multiple replies from the same source, and it is possible the data set includes them.

Nevertheless, the survey results indicate that mass communication programs generally are constructing their capstone courses along the lines suggested in the literature for what such courses could or should look like. Capstones are offered by 80% of the programs surveyed, almost always as a requirement, with broadly based faculty responsibility and small class sizes even in large programs. These approaches closely match the prescriptive view offered by Wagenaar.

Capstones come with a smorgasbord of content areas led by research, theory, and ethics, with the student deliverables focused on presentations and research projects. These are the tools that lend themselves most readily to a backward, integrated look at the student experience. Yet half of the courses also have material on workplace issues and career exploration, which indicates a forward-looking focus as well. Many of the open-ended descriptions accompanying "other" responses to course purposes, teaching methods and student deliverables focused on application of learning or production of student work and portfolios, which integrate prior learning and also help students prepare for the world of work.

Portions of the literature question the efficacy of courses that try to offer both integration and transition. The survey results appear to indicate that mass communication programs are

treading near the danger zone portrayed by Heinemann in which courses are packed so full that all of the topics get superficial treatment. Yet the high satisfaction level among those surveyed indicates that these courses "work" for the departments that offer them, so mass communication programs appear to have found a way to strike this balance and avoid the trap Heinemann describes. Cos and Ivy and also Dickinson distinguish between terminal experiences that are either a cap or a bridge, and suggest that it is difficult for a course to serve both purposes. But mass communication seems to have solved this dilemma, meeting the prescriptive goal of transition described by Gardner and Van der Veer while still largely focusing on integration of prior learning.

This has perhaps been possible because of the field's traditional emphasis on skills development. Journalism programs in particular have always prepared students for a specific post-college career; the same purpose seems to have taken hold for tracks and programs in other media genres such as public relations, advertising and broadcasting. This is evidenced by unit capstones that require field work, portfolios, or productions as part of the course grade because such projects integrate past learning but also create work samples that can be used in getting that first post-college job. It may also be that the dynamic and sometimes tumultuous nature of the mass media obligates faculty to address current issues and concerns with their students before sending them off as practitioners in the field. This helps to make capstone coverage of topics such as ethics, law, and economics, which may be addressed in earlier courses in the academic program, both integrative and transitional.

At the same time, some of the open-ended questions reveal concerns related to the breadth of material packed into many capstones. Many survey responses indicated that the courses can be inconsistent in their coverage of material, depending on the unit offering the

course and/or the instructor. Respondents expressed a desire for more consistency and structure in the pedagogical approach and grading of the course, as well as better integration of unit capstones across the entire program. It is clear that in some programs, capstone faculty are not working together, so the student experience varies significantly, which frustrates some respondents. Within programs and across programs, the capstone has a sort of "do your own thing" flavor. Thus, while a certain body of knowledge and skill set will come out of major courses in mass communication, graduates may have completely different capstone experiences from program to program or even within the same program, depending on the instructor.

How, then, can a discipline with such a diversity of courses and faculty approach the capstone in a consistent and meaningful way? One central framework to consider is the accrediting standards of the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications. Within its Curriculum and Instruction guidelines, ACEJMC recommends core competencies and values that include the following:

- Understanding and application of principles of freedom of speech

- Understanding concepts and applying theories

- Appreciation of ethical principles

- Ability to conduct research

- Ability to write correctly and clearly

- Ability to use the tools of the professions.

While it is clear that not all of these things can or should be learned in the capstone course, the capstone is the logical place for review and demonstration of these skills and abilities. The results of this survey demonstrate that faculty address a wide range of topics in the capstone, and that range closely parallels the guidelines of the discipline's accrediting agency.

In addition, as Redmond and Decker noted, the capstone is the logical place for program assessment of student learning outcomes. Pressures for accountability in higher education from state and federal governments as well as accrediting institutions have mandated assessment activities.[45] In spite of strong faculty resistance, assessment is here to stay.[46] A capstone, which serves the dual purpose of "cap" and "bridge," provides an excellent opportunity for students to demonstrate that they have acquired the knowledge and skills to be successful media practitioners, while at the same time allowing faculty to gather evidence to demonstrate that they have successfully educated their students.

Conclusion

Every college institution, program, course and student is unique, yet they engage in a common purpose of preparing the individual, through educational experiences, for what comes after graduation. Capstone courses can be a powerful tool in making that preparation more valuable and effective for all parties. The results of this survey demonstrate that mass communication programs appear to be using this tool in a purposeful manner that indeed does make this preparation successful for the students and for the institutions that serve them.

Assessment needs, ACEJMC guidelines, and the purposes and goals for capstones described in the literature on pedagogy all point toward a theory of the capstone as an eclectic experience, and the research done here indicates that many mass communication programs are providing exactly that for their students. At the same time, the pivotal role of the capstone course in mass communication programs may suggest the need for a discipline-wide re-examination of this senior experience in order to provide our students with a more consistent method of closure to their undergraduate studies.

Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Survey on Capstone Courses in Mass Communication

This survey is designed to help discover characteristics of capstone courses and the role they play in mass communication departments. We appreciate your taking the time to complete it. THANK YOU!

1. Does your department offer a capstone course?
    Yes (Please continue with survey.)
    No (Please click here to go to end of survey and submit. Thank you for participating.)

2. Is your capstone course:
    a capstone for an entire mass communication program
    a capstone course for a unit within a mass communication program
    other

3. Is your capstone course:
    a requirement
    an elective

4. How frequently is your capstone course offered:
    every semester/quarter/trimester
    once per year
    less than once per year

5. Approximately how many students take this course each year?
    10 or fewer
    11 - 30
    31 - 50
    51 - 100
    More than 100

7. Which of the following could be described as a purpose or rationale for your capstone course? (Check all that apply.)

    Integrate prior learning
    Post-college transition
    Program assessment
    Other (please specify)

6. Approximately how many students are in each section?
     10 or fewer
     11 - 20
     21 - 30
     More than 30

9. Which of the following teaching methods best describes your approach to this course (check all that apply):
     lecture
     discussion
     group presentations
     lab or studio work
     other (please specify)

8. Which of the following best describes faculty staffing of your capstone course? (Check only one.)
     Sole responsibility of one faculty member
     Shared responsibility (e.g., different faculty teach each semester, or teach different sections)
     One faculty member with primary responsibility but others contribute (e.g., in area of expertise)
     Team taught
     Other

10. Which of the following content areas are included in your capstone course? (Check all that apply.)
     theory
     research
     career exploration
     media law
     media ethics
     media economics
     media issues in society
     issues in the media workplace
     leadership
     integration with a liberal arts curriculum
     other (please specify)

11. Do you use a primary text for your course?
     Yes (please answer questions 12 and 13.)
     No (please click here to go to question 14)

12. If you are using a textbook for the course, please indicate which text(s) below (author(s) names, title, year of publication and/or edition):

13. What is your level of satisfaction with the text?
    Very satisfied
    Somewhat satisfied
    Neutral
    Somewhat dissatisfied
    Very dissatisfied

14. Which of the following assignments do you use to evaluate students in the course? (Check all that apply.)
    in-class exams
    take-home exams
    quizzes
    individual presentations
    group presentations
    original research projects
    graded seminar discussions
    attendance/participation
    practicum or field work evaluation
    other (please specify)

15. Please rate your level of satisfaction with your current capstone course:
    Very satisfied
    Somewhat satisfied
    Neutral
    Somewhat dissatisfied
    Very dissatisfied

16. If you see a need for change in the capstone course, what would be your top priority?

17. Please feel free to make any comments on the capstone course in your program or on mass communication capstone courses in general below:

18. Please indicate the individual completing this questionnaire:
    the capstone course instructor
    the department/division chair
    both chair and capstone instructor

Thank you for your responses. We plan to use this information to help in the re-design of our own capstone course and also to share with the membership of AEJMC. If you are interested in the results of this survey before we are able to present them formally, please send an email to jrosenberry@sjfc.edu and we will send you our preliminary findings.

Endnotes

[1] John N. Gardner and Gretchen Van der Veer, "The Emerging Movement to Strengthen the Senior Experience," in *The Senior Year Experience: Facilitating Integration, Reflection, Closure and Transition*, ed. John N. Gardner and Gretchen Van der Veer (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998).

[2] "Comment from the Editor," *Teaching Sociology* 21:3 (July 1993): iv. (Fourteen articles in this issue of the journal were devoted to the topic of capstone courses.)

[3] Diana Ivy and Grant Cos, ed., "The Forum: Capstone Courses," *The Southern Communication Journal* 64:1 (Fall 1998): 59-81. (Four articles in this issue of the journal were by the forum editors and other authors concerning capstone courses.)

[4] Vincent Benigni and Glen Cameron, "Teaching Public Relations Campaigns: The Current State of the Art," *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator* 54:2 (Summer 1999): 50-61; Linda Aldoory and Brenda Wrigley, "Exploring the Use of Real Clients in the PR Campaigns Course," *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator* 54:4 (Winter 2000): 47-59; Vincent Benigni, I-Huei Cheng and Glen Cameron, "The Role of Clients in Public Relations Campaigns Courses," *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator* 59:3 (Autumn 2004): 259-278.

[5] Gardner & Van der Veer, "The Emerging Movement," 15.

[6] Theodore C. Wagenaar, "The Capstone Course," *Teaching Sociology* 21:3 (1993): 209-214.

[7] Wagenaar, "The Capstone Course."

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[44] This was calculated using a modification of a standard formula [in John Netter, William Wasserman and G.A. Whitmore, *Applied Statistics* 2nd ed., (Boston: Allyn and Bacon Publishers, 1982), 349] that can be used to select a sample size, given a particular confidence interval (normalized to a Z score), a particular "half width" error (+/ - percentage points) and a finite population value. However, instead of solving for the sample size, in this case sample size (176), population size (438), and Z value (1.96 standard deviations = 95% confidence interval) were entered into the formula (shown below), and it was solved for "h." A value of .5 was used for "p" because it is the "safest" planning value available; i.e., it leads to the largest possible value of p(1-p) and thus creates the most conservative estimate of sample size or, in this case, sampling error. Solving for h resulted in a value of .057, or $\pm$ 5.7 percentage points sampling error.

$$n = \frac{z^2\, p\, (1-p)}{h^2 + \dfrac{z^2\, p\, (1-p)}{N}}$$

where $z = 1.96$ for 95% confidence interval
$p = .5$ (planning value for population proportion)
$h = ??$ (margin of error to be solved for) $= .057$
$n = 176$ (sample size)
$N = 438$ (population size)

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