

# SENIOR CAPSTONE COMMUNITY PARTNER HANDBOOK

A resource guide for PSU University Studies  
Capstone Community Partners



Developed in collaboration by the Office of University Studies and the Center for  
Academic Excellence/Community-Based Learning

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## WHAT IS THE SENIOR CAPSTONE?

The Senior Capstone is a six-credit community-based learning course. It is the senior-level component of the University Studies general education program at Portland State University. Capstones are interdisciplinary. Students from a variety of majors, under the supervision of a faculty member, work together in collaboration with community partners to address a real community issue. Each Capstone results in a final product that brings closure to the students' experience. Capstone students work in teams to create this product. In addition to the final product, many Capstones require a weekly service learning commitment to the community partner agency.

Every Capstone addresses the four University Studies' goals. Throughout the Capstone experience, the four goals shape both the course and community project.

The goals are as follows:

- Inquiry and Critical Thinking
- Communication
- The Diversity of Human Experience
- Ethics and Social Responsibility

For more information about the Senior Capstone and University Studies, see:

*<http://www.pdx.edu/unst/>*

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## COMBINING SERVICE AND LEARNING: ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

The following principles guide our development of effective Capstone courses. Adapted from *The Wingspread Report: Ten Principles of Good Practice* (1993). Howard, J (Ed.) and *Praxis I: A faculty casebook on community service learning* (pp. 3-12). Ann Arbor: OCSL Press.

### Community Voice

Capstone courses are developed to allow individuals or communities with needs to define those needs.

### Orientation

A thorough orientation to the community partner site is vital to successful community partnerships.

### Reciprocity

The partnership must be worthwhile and valuable for both the student and the community. There must be reciprocity between all partners involved in the community-based experience.

### Reflection

Intentional, systematic reflection must take place in order for students to situate prior knowledge within new ideas and information generated by the community-based experience.

### Development

Community-based learning occurs in different stages. For example, the learning experience often begins with pre-field preparation and moves to engagement in partnership with the community.



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It is important to remain aware of potential challenges participants may face at various stages in the process.

#### Meaningful service

Community-based learning tasks need to be worthwhile and challenging in order to encourage community involvement and to strengthen students' critical thinking skills.

#### Diversity

A priority is placed on involving a broad cross-section of students working in a variety of settings and with diverse populations in the community.

#### Evaluation

There are a variety of methods for evaluating student learning in the community-based context and for assessing how well the Capstone projects have met the needs defined by the community partner.

### THE INSTRUCTOR'S ROLE IN THE CAPSTONE

Capstone courses use community service as a vehicle for students to reach their academic goals by integrating course objectives with community needs. To facilitate this connection, faculty should provide structured opportunities for students to reflect critically on their service experience through writing, reading, group discussion, and classroom activities.

### THE COMMUNITY PARTNER'S ROLE IN CAPSTONE

#### Development of the Community Partnership

Faculty and community partners should meet prior to the course to discuss their objectives and expectations for the Capstone. These objectives and expectations should be put in writing and can be revisited modified throughout the Capstone if the need arises. Important areas for clarification include:

- Faculty member goals and objectives.
- Community partner goals and objectives.
- The type of skills students need to complete the final project.
- The level and kind of input faculty will provide to students about their community work.
- The level of supervision and input the community partner agrees to provide.
- The level and type of responsibility community partners can expect from Capstone students.
- Specific expectations regarding the project timeline and the final product the community partner(s) expects to receive.

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## THE COMMUNITY PARTNER'S ROLE IN CAPSTONE [CONT'D]

### Community Partner Responsibilities

Once the course begins, the community partner is expected to:

- Orient students and University representatives to the community partner and Capstone project, and provide information regarding community partner's administrative and operating policies, procedures, rules, and regulations.
- Specify what duties and responsibilities students are expected to perform.
- Provide students with on-going supervision and support as appropriate to the Capstone project and the students' needs.
- Offer feedback to faculty and students regarding the students' performance and effectiveness in meeting the needs of the community partner.
- Ensure that the work is conducted in accordance with required safety precautions and procedures.
- Make appropriate written arrangements with students and the University, signed by the parties involved, for use of work products resulting for the Capstone project, with regard to acknowledgment of authorship, rights to ownership, and use and sharing of proceeds, in particular

if the work results in patentable or similar products.

## THE STUDENT'S ROLE IN CAPSTONE

### About PSU Students

Nearly 30,000 students are enrolled at Portland State, including approximately 7,100 graduate students. Approximately 64 percent of undergraduates are full-time students enrolled in 12 or more credits, while 36 percent are classified as part-time students. The average age of all PSU undergraduate students is 26.

Approximately 81 percent of the University's students are Oregon residents. PSU also enrolls approximately 3,700 students from other states and over 1,800 international students.

As an urban campus, PSU serves students in a large metropolitan community. Although some students live in residence halls, the vast majority of students commute from off-campus. A large percentage of PSU students hold either on- or off-campus jobs while attending classes. In addition, PSU has a fairly large number of returning students (students returning to school after an extended absence and/or students returning to further their education) and students who have children and other family responsibilities.

When planning for student





involvement in your Capstone, anticipate a wide range of background and experience. For example, some students will be “traditional” college age (18 to 24); however, many others will be older and/or returning students. Some students will have little community, work, or volunteer experience; others will be active community professionals who juggle work and family responsibilities. Planning for the Capstone with an awareness of the diverse characteristics of the PSU student population improves the experience for everyone involved.

Student responsibility in community-based learning

PSU provides Capstone students the following information to enhance their learning experience

and protect them from harm. Students are expected to adhere to the PSU Student Code of Conduct during all Capstone activities. <http://www.pdx.edu/dos/codeofconduct#GeneralPolicy>

I. Students should clearly understand the requirements of their community project:

- I have a clear understanding of both my instructor’s and my community partner’s expectations of me.
- I understand my parameters (I have thought of the consequences of performing actions beyond my agreed responsibilities).
- I have identified the skills needed to carry out this project, and I feel comfortable with those skills.

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## THE STUDENT'S ROLE IN CAPSTONE [CONT'D]

- I have identified the skills needed to carry out this project, and I have devised specific plans for strengthening skills with which I am not comfortable or familiar.
- I know my client population (I am making every attempt to understand their needs from their perspective).
- I know what to do in case of an emergency.

II. Students will have necessary legal documents to participate in the community-based project:

- If I will be driving, I have a valid license and liability insurance.
- If required by the host site, I will complete a security background check for this Capstone. If I am

unable to pass this background check, the instructor will work with me to arrange for an alternate service placement.

III. Students should take responsibility for their behavior throughout the community-based project:

- I understand that I am responsible for my own personal health and safety.
- I have insurance (if agency requires specific coverage for volunteers).
- I understand the waivers I sign.
- I have thought of risks involved in this community-based project. For example:

*What are clients' special needs?*

*What can I do to reduce risks by my own behavior, clothing,*





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*preparation?*

*What behaviors fall outside of my job description? (Example: Is it OK to transport clients?)*

IV. Students will be aware of the legal issues associated with the service-learning experience.

- Negligence involves a mistake, lack of attention, reckless behavior, or indifference to the duty of care of another person. A reasonable person should have been able to foresee the possibility of injury. (Example: wet spot on floor, child climbing on balance beam, etc.)
- Intentional misconduct or criminal misconduct involves potential harm caused by a volunteer. A volunteer is responsible for any harm caused to an organization or individual if the harm resulted from intentional or criminal misconduct on the part of the volunteer. (A crime is a crime even if you are a volunteer.)
- Invasion of privacy involves confidentiality. Follow the confidentiality policies of the agency. If they do not clearly inform you of the policy ask them for their policy guidelines regarding this. (Example: client histories and personal records are confidential.)

## POLICIES GOVERNING STUDENT SAFETY AT THE COMMUNITY PARTNER SITE

The following policies are in place to ensure the safety of Capstone students at their service-learning sites:

Capstone policy on students in private residences

In cases where students are interacting directly with community members as part of their service work, students are not to enter community members' private home/residence unless special arrangements have been made between the course instructor and Seanna Kerrigan, Capstone Program Director.

Capstone policy on harassment

Students have the right to adequate supervision, feedback from supervisors, and a reasonably safe, harassment-free working environment. Harassment comes in many forms, but it is typically the use of power or authority by one person to pressure or intimidate another person, using verbal, physical, or sexual conduct. Community partners should take reasonable steps to ensure that students have a productive working environment.

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## POLICIES GOVERNING STUDENT SAFETY AT THE COMMUNITY PARTNER SITE [CONT'D]

Capstone policy on requests directed toward students

Requests made of students should be limited to actions that directly pertain to students' agreed-to service and academic responsibilities. Examples of inappropriate requests (outside of agreed-to responsibilities) include, but are not limited to: requests for personal favors, requests for loan of an automobile or other personal property items, invitations to social events not related to Capstone responsibilities, and requests for additional work or service hours above those that are required to complete the service portion of Capstone.

Capstone policy on use of community partner agency vehicles

Vehicles belonging to community partner agencies can be lent to Capstone student volunteers only if the following conditions are met: (1) the community partner agency possesses insurance covering volunteer drivers; (2) the student driver has signed community partner agency paperwork certifying that they are a volunteer; and (3) the student possesses the minimum automobile insurance required by the state of Oregon.

Capstone policy on transportation and liability

The state of Oregon and Portland State University, together with their agents, officers, employees, and volunteers, are not liable for personal injury or property damage resulting from group or individual travel to or from activities related to participation in Senior Capstone. Students who are driving should possess a valid driver's license and driver's insurance for the duration of their Capstone.

## DEALING WITH DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR AT THE COMMUNITY PARTNER SITE

Portland State greatly values our community partners. We know you address important issues in our community and serve a wide diversity of populations ranging from K-12 school-based programs to inter-generational programs serving the elderly. We realize many of our community organizations serve vulnerable populations such as at-risk youth, individuals with mental illness, and those with physical limitations. Therefore, we encourage all of our community partners who place our students in direct contact with clients (especially those working with vulnerable populations) to employ all volunteer screening policies at your sites. Portland State University does not mandate any of our students to receive background checks, but we completely support



any agency that requires background checks of our students. As an urban university we know we have a diverse student body which does include students with mental illness and criminal backgrounds. We encourage agencies to follow all of their own volunteer policies to screen PSU students in the same way you would screen a volunteer from the general public.

Please inform the Capstone faculty member if you need to restrict a student from entering your site. Students can be restricted from a site based on:

- A Student Code of Conduct complaint filed based on inappropriate behavior in a PSU classroom which allegedly interfered with student learning, health, or safety.
- A Student Code of Conduct complaint based on attendance in a PSU Capstone in which a student is allegedly under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- A “pending” hearing of a Student Code of Conduct complaint against a student enrolled in a Capstone course where the complaint involves inappropriate interpersonal conduct with faculty, staff, or students at PSU.
- A refusal to complete a background check as required by a community partner.
- Community partner complaint about a student’s behaviour on site or in a PSU classroom.
- A failed background check conducted by a community partner.

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## DEALING WITH DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR AT THE COMMUNITY PARTNER SITE [CONT'D]

If you have any questions about the restriction of a student, please first contact the faculty of the course. You are completely empowered to ask any student to leave your community site for any safety reason. Please use your own protocols for working with problematic volunteers. If you need to speak to Portland State University about a student of concern, please contact the PSU C.A.R.E. Team at (503) 725-5341, [www.pdx.edu/dos/care-team](http://www.pdx.edu/dos/care-team). If you need an additional resource, please call Seanna Kerrigan, the Capstone Program Director at Portland State University at (503) 725-8392.

## PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR WORKING WITH CAPSTONE STUDENTS

*Adapted with permission from Community Agency Service-Learning Handbook, Miami-Dade Community College.*

It is important to remember that Capstone students are students, not volunteers. In addition to helping meet important community needs, students are also utilizing their service experience as the basis for understanding of their college course material. We rely on community partners to help students reflect on their service experience and to encourage students to explore the broader societal implications of the issue your agency addresses.



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## Plan ahead

Clear, well thought-out descriptions outlining tasks, responsibilities, and skills needed are extremely helpful to the students. This could be part of the clarification process.

Provide an orientation to your agency

Orientation to your facility or agency is vitally important for students. This orientation may take place at PSU, the community agency, or some other location, depending upon the nature of the project. Orientation can include:

- A tour of the facility and an introduction to the staff.
- A review of rules, policies, dress codes, timekeeping requirements, and other pertinent information.
- A discussion of the students' role, including specific community expectations.
- A description of the "larger picture": why you do what you do, and how the students' contributions fit in.
- A review of skills needed to complete the community project.
- An explanation of any jargon or site-specific language used by agency or community partners.

Keep students' hectic schedules in mind

Many PSU students juggle work and family responsibilities in addition to their full course loads. In order to plan their schedules, most students will need specific and reliable information about expected number of working hours, times, and days of the week they are expected to work (if appropriate), as well as advanced notice of schedule changes if possible.

Stay involved

You are truly a partner in the students' education, and they will benefit tremendously from your guidance throughout all the phases of the community project. They will also appreciate regular feedback on their efforts and acknowledgement of work well done.

Say thanks

Capstone students are often anxious to become involved and make a difference in their community. Like everyone, they want to know if their efforts are appreciated, and to see how their work contributes to your agency's mission. Acknowledging their efforts could range from a simple thank you to letters of recognition.



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PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR  
WORKING WITH CAPSTONE  
STUDENTS [CONT'D]

Communicate

Keep the Capstone faculty informed of any concerns, successes, or other issues related to the community project. Concerns should be communicated immediately so that you and your faculty partner can resolve issues that otherwise might impact the students or the project. The Capstone support staff is also available to provide resources to faculty and students covering a wide range of issues.

CAPSTONE SUPPORT STAFF:  
WHO'S WHO

University Studies Office

Cramer Hall 117  
(503) 725-5890

University Studies provides clerical support for the Capstone program and provides an ongoing communication link between community partners and PSU. If you have an immediate need please call the main office number listed above. For specific questions related to your course, please contact the following individuals:

Cody Rich  
Office Specialist  
(503) 725-5890

Cody provides general support for the University Studies Program. He

is the best person to call if you need to cancel a class session, if you have a general question, and/or if you need assistance in identifying the right person to speak with about a particular concern.

Seanna Kerrigan  
Capstone Program Director  
(503) 725-8392

Seanna's role includes working with community organizations to identify appropriate Capstone projects and working with University faculty to conceptualize, propose, and revise Capstone course proposals.

Janelle Voegele  
(503) 725-8341

Janelle provides support resources for University faculty and students once the Capstone courses are in place. She provides training and materials on a variety of communication, group process, and diversity issues, as well as service-learning principles and practices. She also coordinates a team of University professionals who provide resources in areas such as health and safety, assessment, reflection, leadership, and career development. Janelle also serves as a liaison to the state Attorney General's office for legal issues related to the Capstone program.

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Yves Labissiere  
Interim Director  
University Studies  
(503) 725-3568

Yves oversees the University Studies Program, including Freshman Inquiry, Sophomore Inquiry, Upper Division Cluster courses, and Senior Capstone. His role is similar to that of a department chair, including overseeing program coordination, authorizing the hiring of faculty, and guiding the continued development of the program.

Donna Harris  
Executive Assistant  
(503) 725-4949

Donna is the executive assistant to Yves Labissiere. She also coordinates room scheduling for special events.

Katherine Barich  
Program Scheduler  
(503) 725-5895

Katherine manages the course scheduling process for Capstone courses. She can help you confirm the days, times, and location for your Capstone course. She also manages course descriptions online. You can also contact Katherine to obtain information about the Capstone Fair.

Thuy Vu  
Accountant  
(503) 725-5843



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