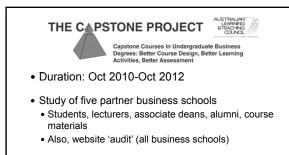## Innovative practices in undergraduate business capstones

Liz van Acker and Janis Bailey

Griffith University

E.vanacker@griffith.edu.au

07 37357696

J.bailey@griffith.edu.au

07 5552 7748

THE CAPSTONE PROJECT

AUSTRALIAN LEARNING & TEACHING COUNCIL

Capstone Courses in Undergraduate Business Degrees: Better Course Design, Better Learning Activities, Better Assessment

- Duration: Oct 2010-Oct 2012

- Study of five partner business schools
  - Students, lecturers, associate deans, alumni, course materials
  - Also, website 'audit' (all business schools)

- Outputs: Good Practice Guide and website, Literature Review, journal articles eg HERD Nov 2014

---

www.businesscapstones.edu.au

BUSINESS CAPSTONES

Home | About the project | Useful links & resources | Contact us

About Capstone Courses | Institutional and Faculty Perspectives | Case Studies | Planning a Capstone Course | Teaching & Learning Activities | Assessment | Teaching & Learning Theories

Griffith UNIVERSITY · MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY · THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE AUSTRALIA · QUT · University of New England

Aims of presentation

- Capstone experiences and types
- Features
- Some key findings
- Capability and employability
- Innovative examples
- Learning and teaching approaches

Capstone experiences and types

- Capstone units are a subset of 'capstone experiences'. Other examples:
  - Work-integrated learning
  - Internships
  - Study abroad
- Usually final year/semester, but can be earlier
- Types
  - Magnet: within a major
  - Mountaintop: within a degree ('multidisciplinary')
  - Mandate: required by outside body

(Rowles et al. 2004)

Features of capstones I

- Aims (and arguments for having them)
  - *Consolidate* previous learning
  - *Apply* previous learning
  - *Consolidate and demonstrate* 'soft skills'
  - Vehicle for *professional socialisation/identity formation*
  - Students should question 'what they know' ie 'transformative'

- Both a 'synthesis' and a 'bridge'
- Both cognitive and affective aims

Features of capstones II

- Project-based team work
- Opportunities to apply knowledge eg via case studies
- Emphasis on developing graduate skills
- Reduced emphasis on or no examinations (disciplinary issues)
- Practitioner input (as guest lecturers, research informants, mentors, or assessors)
- Less formal contact time (esp lecturing) and more informal activities

(Bailey et al, 2007)

Some key findings

- 36% of all Oz business schools have a capstone for *all* students; 51% for *some* students (2011)
- Spread unevenly and largely by lecturer innovation, although increasingly programmatic
- No 'one model' for a capstone – large diversity
- An opportunity for dialogue about major/degree and its outcomes
- A site for assurance of learning (AoL)

Capstones, capability and employability

- Course outlines
  - explicit focus on 'backward' functions (integration etc)
  - less emphasis on 'forward' functions
- However, good assessment items are necessarily 'forward-looking'
- More emphasis on designing capstones with an explicitly 'forward looking' graduate capability & employability frame would be useful
  - eg professional socialisation and identity formation
  - portfolio items – for job seeking

Innovative examples

- **Employment Relations:** small 'new graduate' exercises, & facilitation
- **Marketing:** use of simulation 'Markstrat'
- **Financial planning:** financial plan for a client
- **Accountancy:** PBL: 'unstructured' problems
- **Public relations:** campaign plan, 'pitch', portfolio of tactics
- **Public policy:** ministerial briefing note/cabinet submission
- **Entrepreneurship:** building and launching a new venture
- **Mountaintop:** computer simulation, based on 'socially innovative' commerce; UN Global Compact (Wollongong)
- *Some based on 'personal development' (ie 'transition' focus)*

Learning & teaching approaches (see GPG or website)

- Possible approaches (by no means exhaustive) include:

  - Action learning
  - Constructivist approaches
  - Problem-based learning
  - The case study method
  - Simulations

Project partners

- Leigh Wood [Macquarie University]
- Lynda Andrews and Erica French [QUT]
- Johanna Macneil and Jim Psaros [University of Newcastle]
- Jan Turbill and Michael Zanko [University of Wollongong]
- Liz van Acker, Janis Bailey (co-leaders), Lorelle Frazer, Ray Hibbins and Keithia Wilson [Griffith University]

- Project Officer: Jacqui Fyffe (j.fyffe@griffith.edu.au)

THE CAPSTONE PROJECT

AUSTRALIAN LEARNING &TEACHING COUNCIL

Capstone Courses in Undergraduate Business Degrees: Better Course Design, Better Learning Activities, Better Assessment