Capstone Proposal Guidelines
Master of Arts in Cultural Sustainability

Summary

Capstones are culminating six-credit educational experiences, which demonstrate a student's mastery of the educational objectives and core concepts of the program and ability to synthesize them into effective strategies for working in this field. The goal is to demonstrate leadership in the field, capability to carry out research and analysis about cultural sustainability issues and/or the ability to work successfully with organizations that promote cultural sustainability. The Capstone will usually be based upon a well-defined and focused community project in the student's given area of interest. The project can take the form of, but is not limited to, an exhibition, curriculum, community-based ethnography, a public policy white paper, a tourism plan, social entrepreneurship initiative, or planning document for local environmental and/or cultural sustainability). Community project Capstones must include a Reflective Paper that relates and critically assesses the student's experience in developing and executing the project and summarizes the student's application of the core concepts of cultural sustainability to the project. A Capstone may alternatively result in an academic thesis which must include an analysis of the practical applicability of the cultural sustainability topic investigated in the thesis. All Capstones must include a literature review comprising brief summaries of publications that have influenced the student's project or thesis, including those from their courses in the MACS program. If the Capstone will include interviews and/or research on a topic that may require IRB approval, a proposal must be submitted for approval by the Goucher College Institutional Review Board (IRB) at least two months prior to the beginning of field research.

There are four key questions that frame the goals of the MACS program. All Capstones should engage with one or more of these questions:

1. How can we work with communities in identifying and nurturing traditions of knowledge and practice that are meaningful and valued by those communities? In other words, how can we help to sustain culture?

2. How can we make a difference in conceptualizing and implementing actions that foster sustainable cultural discourses, practices and processes? In other words, how can we work together in creating the cultures of a sustainable future?

3. How do cultural knowledge and practices contribute to human and ecological wellbeing, and how can these aspects of culture be strengthened? In other words how can we work toward sustaining culture that sustains people and the planet?

4. What ways can culture contribute to peace and social justice, and how can we work effectively with communities in strengthening the capacity of cultural forms and processes to address conflict, increase good will, and generate greater understanding within and among cultural groups? In other words, how do we encourage cultural health and equity in a diverse and unequal world?

Capstones are normally undertaken only after the completion of at least 33 of the required 42 MACS course credits (31.5 of 40.5, if you entered the program before FA2013) and a cumulative GPA of at least 3.0. One additional course (up to 3 credits) may be taken concurrent with the Capstone semester(s). Capstones are offered in each semester and should be completed over the course of either one or two semesters, under the guidance of a three-person Capstone Committee. Credits can be divided between two semesters in variable ways (3/3, 2/4, 1.5/4.5) according to the student's needs and educational objectives.

In the semesters leading up to the Capstone, students are encouraged to talk with faculty about Capstone projects in order to conceptualize and develop the Capstone topic and project. The student should also begin to identify a Capstone Advisor in the semesters prior to the Capstone. In the semester immediately preceding the expected start of the Capstone, students are expected to confirm a Capstone Advisor and two Second Readers who will work with the student to outline the project, methodologies, and timeline. The student must work closely with the Capstone Advisor to develop the proposal and it should be shared with the committee members for feedback. A final draft of the proposal must be submitted to the Academic Director at least two weeks before the last day of the semester prior to enrollment in the Capstone. After initial approval, the final proposal, complete with signatures, must be submitted to the Academic Director by the last day of that semester.   This application is also entered into the student's program portfolio. Students will be expected to have completed their ePortfolio and made it available to the Academic Director for review prior to approval of the Capstone proposal. Upon completion of the Capstone, the student will present and defend the Capstone project to the Capstone Committee.

Advisors/Readers

Students engaged in Capstones will work most closely with their Capstone Advisor who will be the principle mentor for their work. Together, they will set the scope of the capstone, determine how it will be graded, fine tune the purpose and methodology, and monitor the student's progress. The Capstone Advisor must be on the faculty of the MACS program and have content knowledge of the capstone's focus. The Capstone Advisor is the primary point of contact between the student and the two Second Readers and will meet with the student on a regular basis as set out in the Plan of Work and Communication agreed to by the Advisor and student in the Capstone Proposal. For this reason, it is suggested that faculty serve as advisors for no more than two Capstones at a time. The Capstone Advisor will work with the student to determine if Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements pertain to the proposed project and, if IRB requirements apply, to submit an appropriate application to the Board for review.

Two Second Readers contribute to the proposal, helping the student and Advisor with objectives, methodology, expectations, literature references, and other guidance as appropriate to their areas of expertise. Together, the Advisor and two readers form the student's Capstone Committee. One of the second readers may be someone from outside the Goucher community, but the student must demonstrate why that person is appropriate to serve as a reader and must submit a CV or resume for that person along with the Capstone proposal.

The committee as a whole will convene in person, by phone or Webex with the student, at least three times:

~ First, at the very beginning of the first Capstone semester to establish a strategy for working together, negotiate the boundaries and reasonable scope of the project, suggest relevant literature and other resources, confirm the elements that should be part of the final product, agree on the core concepts to be explored and, create a rubric for the student;

~ Second, at a midway point in the capstone to give the student feedback on capstone progress;

~ Third, at the end of the capstone when the student will submit and defend the final product to the committee.

The Committee may also meet without the student at the beginning of the Capstone or at other times in the semester if there are problems with the progress of the Capstone.

A Capstone Advisor can expect to spend approximately 45-50 hours reading, advising and communicating with the student and committee members. A second reader can expect to spend about 15 hours reading, commenting and meeting with the committee.

The Role of the Academic Director

The Academic Director provides Capstone Information Sessions during residency and online. All students are expected to attend at least one of these sessions. The Academic Director is also available to discuss Capstone project ideas with students, make recommendations, if requested, about Capstone Committee members and guide the student on procedural questions. However, the Capstone Advisor is the primary guide during the Capstone process. The Academic Director reviews all Capstone proposals for clarity, relevance to the program's learning outcomes, feasibility of the workplan, implications for IRB, and completion of all expected elements. The Academic Director has final approval for all Capstone proposals. Once a student is enrolled in their Capstone, the Academic Director provides periodic Webex gatherings for all Capstone students to share their progress and learn from each other.   Faculty members may participate in these gatherings.

Student Expectations

Students are expected to have completed their e-portfolio before approval of their Capstone proposal.

Throughout the course of the Capstone, students will have access to a non-credit online forum in the GoucherLearn learning management system for feedback and support from one another, from the Academic Directors and from committee members.

A student should expect to spend approximately 240 productive hours on a Capstone project, including research, development, writing, and communication with advisors. Capstone projects are directly informed by the classes and readings that have been explored in the program. Links to that learning should be explicitly made in the Capstone proposal. The work and course experiences that influence student Capstone project selection should be cited and annotated in the proposal, along with additional readings undertaken during preparation of the proposal. The content and format of the Capstones may vary but each capstone must reflect the following:

~ Mastery of the key terms and concepts of the field of cultural sustainability, as acquired in the core courses as well as the student's electives or area of concentration.

~ An ability to apply these core concepts to practical real-world settings.

~ Competency with appropriate professional skills and concepts (communications, documentation, leadership, management, etc.), as demonstrated by implementation of a Capstone project, whether a public program or event, or through planning and development of

a well-crafted thesis.

~ A grasp of the literature and other relevant resources that best inform the ideas developed and explored in the Capstone project. The literature read and cited for a project-based Capstone need not consist solely of academic, peer-reviewed scholarship. For example, the literature cited may be institutional publications such as magazine or website articles and blogs, professional association literature, interviews with leaders in the field, material published in association with a cultural sustainability-related project such as an exhibition brochure. Students should research exemplary projects that would serve as models for their own project.

~ Professional quality work that makes an original contribution to the field of cultural sustainability.

Final Submission

All Capstone materials (paper, interview transcriptions, website links, project publications, etc.) will be housed digitally in the Goucher College Library Archives. The student retains copyright to all original material. Items to be submitted will be determined by the format and structure of the Capstone. For an academic thesis, the submission will be between 80 and 100 pages. The thesis should be organized to include a clear statement of intent, the literature that framed the key questions, the methodology, description and analysis of the research that forms the empirical basis of the thesis or masters paper, implications for applying the findings to real-world settings, and a conclusion consisting of a summary of research insights along with analysis and recommendations which relate the work to the field of cultural sustainability. The master's thesis must include a bibliography and may also be accompanied by transcripts or logs, relevant documents and/or other supporting appendices.

For community project Capstones, the student and advisor will determine in advance what they expect to submit as evidence of the quality and content of the work. These elements should be identified in the proposal. All project-based Capstones will include a 20-25 page Reflective paper which includes a literature review.

The Defense

The capstone committee will review the student's portfolio before recommending that the student proceed to the Defense. Substandard quality or missing elements in the portfolio should be identified and addressed before the defense is allowed to take place. This will ensure the defense does not have a negative outcome. Acceptance of the work, or a request for minor

revisions followed by acceptance, are the most common expected outcomes of the defense. Minor revisions should be of the nature that they are typically completed in 1 – 2 weeks. The defense will be conducted in person or by WebEx.

The defense will typically last between 1 – 1 ½ hours. . The student will take about 20 minutes to provide an overview of the Capstone project, outlining the question(s) investigated, lessons learned, the methodology used, the relevance and outcomes of the Capstone and its contribution to the field of cultural sustainability. After the presentation, committee members will ask questions of the student and engage in a dialogue about the Capstone and its relevance to the field of cultural sustainability. The student will be informed through WebEx or phone call as soon as possible, typically within one hour, if the Capstone has been approved or if revisions are requested.

Extensions

From time to time unforeseen circumstances can intervene and disrupt a student's progress on the Capstone. Extensions can be granted at the discretion of the Academic Directors. We encourage you to bring to our attention, as soon as possible, ANY issues that may result in the delay of your Capstone. The sooner we know, the sooner we can provide useful and effective guidance. Extensions can be either:

~ a short 2-3 week extension past the end of the semester at no charge

~ a five –week extension at a reduced course fee

~ a full semester extension with a 50% additional course fee

No more than one extension is permitted. Students who are unsuccessful at finishing their Capstones in the time allotted will not graduate. The Capstone Advisor plays a key role in ensuring the scope of the project is manageable, giving timely and appropriate feedback, and monitoring student progress, but ultimately the student is responsible for successfully completing the Capstone.