The **Capstone Experience** is a culminating activity that provides a way for students to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they acquired during their secondary school years of education. It engages students in a project/experience that focuses on an interest, career path or academic pursuit that synthesizes classroom study and real world perspective. High school students are asked to demonstrate their ability to apply key knowledge and skills by planning, completing and presenting a culminating project linked to one or more area of personal interest and the individual's Student Success Plan.

The capstone experience may include an in-depth project, reflective portfolio, community service and/or internship. As part of the experience, the student will demonstrate research, communication and technology skills including additional relevant 21st century skills.

Work on the Capstone Project may begin as early as 9th grade. Successful completion of a Capstone Project will earn the student one credit toward high school graduation.

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**Connecticut Assessment Forum**  
**August 12-13 2010**  
**Ann Gaulin, Marilyn Wagner-Jansson**
**Capstone Experience** (6/01/09 Draft)

**Capstone Mission and Overview**

The Capstone Experience is designed to prepare high school students for lifelong learning and effective and productive citizenship through the opportunity to plan, complete and present a self-directed culminating project reflecting their personal interest. The Capstone Experience requires students to demonstrate the most important components of their K-12 learning. It must therefore provide a context for students to “find, manipulate and use content to learn, solve problems, create and think for a lifetime” (Connecticut Career Pathways: Seasons of Change and Transition).

Within the general guidelines provided in this document, Connecticut schools and districts have the flexibility to design Capstone expectations consistent with their mission. Although Capstone projects are culminating events, planning may begin as early as ninth grade. Successful completion of a Capstone Experience will earn the student one credit toward high school graduation.

Refining or developing Capstone Experiences will help schools and districts:

- Increase student engagement, particularly during the senior year
- Ensure that all students meet the goals articulated in their Student Success Plans
- Align ongoing improvement efforts with Connecticut’s Plan for Secondary School Reform as well as with New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) accreditation standards, which call for school cultures to be driven by their core values and 21st century learning expectations.

**Core Components of Successful Capstone Programs**

**I. CHOICE – Provides opportunities for student choice and self-direction**

Student choice is the single most important component of a successful Capstone Experience. Students are best motivated to carry out a rigorous Capstone process that extends and deepens their learning when they are encouraged to explore topics that capture their personal passions and goals. Schools must therefore provide substantial flexibility and appropriate support for students to determine the focus of their own project. *Essential* elements include:

1. Student leadership and flexibility in choice of topic
2. Support of in-school advisor/mentor in articulation of topic, work plan, and objectives
3. Projects that “stretch” each student by requiring new learning

*Recommended* elements for schools to consider when designing Capstone projects that include experiential components include:

1. Internships
2. Career shadowing
3. Hands-on projects

II. STANDARDS and SKILLS – Aligns with and demonstrates the school’s stated mission, core learner expectations and 21st century skills

The Capstone Experience is a culminating project, requiring students to demonstrate the school’s core values and standards and to apply key knowledge and skills. Essential standards and skills include:

1. Thinking critically and creatively
2. Demonstrating flexibility and initiative
3. Conducting analysis and research, including proper citation of references (print and web resources, interviews, etc.)
4. Communicating ideas through multiple modalities
5. Using technology effectively

III. PROCESSES – Engages students in experiences that include research, self-reflection and self-evaluation

The Capstone Experience reflects the belief that the processes inherent in learning are at least as important as the products. Even though seniors prepare and present a major project of their own invention and design, all should complete certain common processes. Essential processes include:

1. Developing and implementing a plan of action
2. Conducting research
3. Working with an advisor/mentor
4. Presenting/exhibiting through multiple modalities, with question and answer or other form of interaction
5. Reflecting and self-evaluating

IV. PRODUCTS – Requires students to present their learning in a variety of ways, including through writing and public demonstration

The Capstone Experience provides students with several opportunities to showcase their work. Essential products include:

1. Project proposal
2. Reflective journal/process log
3. Final product
4. Presentation/exhibition
5. Reflection and self-evaluation
V. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE – Incorporates a system to support and facilitate student, school and community engagement

Schools with Capstone Experience implement key organizational and structural elements. **Essential** structural elements include:

1. Systematic process to introduce and cultivate Capstone in school and community
2. Planning timeline for students that begins prior to the senior year, and includes specific milestones
3. School-wide program coordinator
4. Structured system for regular monitoring and recording by in-school adult advisor/mentor of each student’s progress on articulated milestones around clear timeline
5. Program handbooks for students and teachers that provide details such as timelines, work expectations, rubrics, etc.
6. Rigor in overall work expectations equivalent to one credit of high school work (i.e., equivalent to a full-year course)
7. Connections to Student Success Plan
8. Clearly articulated scoring tools to evaluate student success on required products of project (and possibly processes as well)
9. Systematic inclusion of Capstone in key school resources and communications (Handbook, Course of Study, web site, parent orientation, etc.)

**Recommended** structural elements for schools to consider include:

1. Vertical articulation with middle school (alignment of middle school curriculum to prepare students for Capstone work, require middle school mini-capstone project, explain Capstone at middle school parent night, invite middle school parents to high school project exhibitions)
2. Opportunities for student leadership of Capstone program
3. Include community mentors in projects as appropriate
### CAPSTONE: ESSENTIAL AND RECOMMENDED PRACTICES  (6/11/09 DRAFT)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Recommended</th>
<th>Examples (See Contacts below)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1. Choice** | - Student chooses focus  
- Requires new learning  
- In-school advisor* support | - Experiential learning  
- Mission: Barrington HS  
- Student expectations: JBHS  
- Branford HS  
- Personalized learning: Bolton HS |
| **2. Standards and Skills** | - Critical and creative thinking  
- Flexibility and initiative | - Analysis and research  
- Multi-modal communication  
- Effective use of technology  
- Guiding questions: JBHS  
- Faculty reading: Barrington HS  
- Learner Outcome: Branford HS |
| **3. Processes** | - Plan  
- Research  
- Implement  
- Present | - Reflect  
- Self-Evaluate  
- Ongoing in-school adult advisor/mentor*  
- Phase of project: Bolton HS  
- Senior Project Calendar: Barrington HS |
| **4. Products** | - Proposal  
- Journal or Process Log  
- End Product | - Presentation/Demonstration  
- Reflection  
- Self-Evaluation  
- Final Reflection: JBHS  
- Demonstration Evening: Bolton HS  
- Graduation Exhibit: Branford HS |
| **5. Supporting Organizational Structure** | - Early planning  
- Program Coordinator  
- Required for graduation  
- Expectations worthy of one high school credit  
- Scoring tools  
- Introduction for school and community  
- In-school advisor/mentor* also monitors student progress  
- Systematic inclusion in school resources  
- Connections to Student Success Plan  | - Vertical articulation with middle school  
- Student leadership of Capstone program  
- Community mentors  
- Faculty coordinator, 23 faculty advisors: Branford HS  
- Technical advisor: JBHS  
- Coordinators: JBHS, Barrington HS |

Draft as of 6/11/09
Contacts for Examples Cited in Table:

- Bolton High School “Senior Demonstration” – Contact: Paul Smith, Principal (Phone: 860-643-2768; Email: PaulK.Smith@boltonct.org)
- Branford High School “Senior Graduation Exhibition” – Contact: Tom Murray, Coordinator (Phone: 203-488-7291)
- Joel Barlow High School (JBHS) “Capstone” – Contact: Christina Rao, Coordinator (Phone: 203-938-2508, X 1157; Email: crao@region9ps.org)
- Barrington High School (Barrington, Rhode Island) “Senior Project” – Contact: Judianne Point (Phone: 401-247-3195; Email: seniorproject@bpsmail.org)

Other Resources:

- Senior Project Center: http://www.seniorproject.net/
- NWREL, The Senior Project, North Salem H.S., Salem, Oregon – Contact: Ken Hansen (Phone: 503-399-3241)
The Capstone Project and Capstone English Grades

According to the *Oxford High School Program of Studies 2010-2011*:

All seniors are required to complete the Capstone Project, which entails a research paper on a topic of the student’s choice, at least fifteen hours of fieldwork on that topic, and an oral presentation on the results of this work at the end of the school year. Work on the Capstone Project will be supported in English classes, and successful completion of the project will count towards the student’s grade in these senior English classes. All students must take a full-year English class for credit during their senior year.

With this in mind, the Capstone Project counts as 10 percent of your second, 25 percent of your third, and 30 percent of your fourth quarter grade in your senior English course. The following is a breakdown of the value of each individual assignment per quarter:

**Second Quarter (10%)**
- Letter of Intent and Mentor Information/Parental Acknowledgement Form 5%
  (On time and complete with stamped envelope addressed to mentor)
- Approved Letter of Intent 5%
  (Must be approved by Nov. 10)
- Sign of Commitment 5%
  (On time and complete)

**Third Quarter (25%)**
  (On time and complete)
- 1st Draft of Research Paper with Final Outline 5%
  (On time and passes “Yes” Test)
- 2nd Draft of Research Paper 15%
  (Graded using Capstone Project Research Paper Scoring Rubric)

**Fourth Quarter (30%)**
- Final Copy of Research Paper 5%
  (On time and must pass “Yes” Test)
- Practice Speech 10%
- Portfolio 15%
  (On time and complete)
Capstone Project
2010 – 2011

Oxford High School
Oxford, Connecticut

Coordinators:
Marilyn Wagner-Janssen and Adrienne Brown

CAPSTONE PROJECT:

A Model Approach for Engaging Seniors
Mission Statement

The Capstone Project challenges students to demonstrate and display their mastery of many of the skills they acquired during their years in the Oxford Public Schools. One of the goals of the Capstone Project is to allow students to take control and have a powerful voice in their own education and development both as learners and individuals. Student choice and personal interest are valued and recognized during each phase of the Capstone Project. It is an opportunity for students to demonstrate what they know. Students are able to accomplish and to showcase this achievement while stretching their boundaries of intellect and academic abilities.
What is the Capstone Project?

- Topic
- Fieldwork
- Research Paper
- Presentation

The Capstone Project and Capstone English Grades

- 10 % Second Quarter Grade
- 25 % Third Quarter Grade
- 30 % Fourth Quarter Grade
Getting Started:
Topic Selection

The *only* restrictions that apply to a student’s choice of topic are:

- Legal and appropriate
- Parents must agree with it
- Represents a *learning stretch*

Getting Started:
Choose wisely!

- Choose a topic in which you are truly interested!
- Dare to dream!
- Don’t get discouraged!
- Approach potential community mentors personally!
- Maintain contact with your mentor!
THE OHS CAPSTONE PROJECT IS A GRADUATION REQUIREMENT*

– *per School Board policy 5123.3 established November 13, 2007.

Getting Started:
First Assignment

- Letter of Intent  (October 18)
- Mentor Information/Parental Acknowledgement Form
- Stamped Envelope Addressed to Mentor
- Project Journal
Fieldwork:
Who can be a mentor?
The mentor must:
- be at least 21 years of age
- not be a family member or relative
- not be a current employer

Fieldwork is documented by having the mentor sign the fieldwork time log and write and sign a letter of recommendation.

Project Portfolio

Portfolio Requirements Include:
- Personalized Cover
- Table of Contents
- Letter of Introduction to Judges
- Letter of Intent and Mentor Information/Parental Acknowledgement Form
- Project Journal: Reflections and Observations
- Interview Evaluation Form / Thank You Letter for Personal Interview
- Final “Approved” Research Paper
- Fieldwork Time Log signed by Mentor
- Letter of Recommendation from and signed by Mentor
Capstone Board Presentations
- How did I choose my project?
- What did I do for my Research Paper and Fieldwork? What insights did I gain from doing them?
- What is the “link”?
- What was my Learning Stretch? What kind of problems did I encounter? How did I solve them?
- What did I learn?
- How did it change my life or future goals?

What happens if I am a “Not Yet”

???
Supports for Students

- Topic Selection
  - September 16, 2010
  - September 23, 2010

- Letter of Intent
  - October 7, 2010
  - October 14, 2010

Contact Information

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