Capstone Overview

Through AAD 750: Capstone Course in Arts Administration, students will complete a research project that results in a major paper describing their topic, research methods, analysis and findings. At the course’s conclusion, students will present and defend their projects to the Arts Administration Graduate Committee.

What is a Capstone Project?

The capstone project consists of three elements:
  • Research and analysis
  • Written paper resulting from the research and analysis
  • Oral presentation and defense

During the Capstone Course, students will focus on their writing and presentation. Thus, students should come prepared to the course with a thorough understanding of the literature on their topic. There will not be much time for reading within the course.
Types of Projects

Students may choose to work with an actual arts organization to complete the project or complete a conceptual or theoretical paper.

Most projects shaped around an actual arts organization are considered a case study but it may also be a demographic study.

Case Study. Case studies are a form of qualitative research that allows the researcher to focus specifically on one aspect or activity of an organization. Case studies are in-depth and descriptive, examining only the specifics of the “case.” The research will need a clear research question and theoretical approach. A case study may include interviews of members of the organization, protocol analyses, participant-observations and other forms of data collection.

Case studies are essentially “stories,” narratives that zero in on a specific real-life issue. For instance, a case study could examine an arts organization in order to determine its mission, and to what degree the mission consciously drives the organization and its various functions? To what degree the mission determines the success of the organization?

You could also use a case study to examine organizations that impact arts organizations such as arts service organizations, governmental agencies or unions. A research question might be: What support does the local musician’s union provide its players and to what degree do the musicians support the union?

Demographic Study. In a qualitative visitor and non-visitor study, the researcher would examine a specific arts organization. For example, your partner organization might want to find out who is currently visiting the organization and why they are visiting, in order to cater to the existing audiences’ needs and interests. Conversely, knowing who is not coming to the organization and why they are not would be helpful if the organization is trying to reach out to more diverse community members. Without knowing who the target audience is, your marketing, fundraising, programing, and other efforts will be less focused and less effective. Research questions may include: Who are our current visitors and why do they keep coming back? Who is not coming to our organization and why don’t they visit?
Students also seem to be interested in conducting social media or web-based practice research. Essentially, this is a case study.

Social Media and Web-Based Practices. With arts organizations paying more attention to web-based or social media-based fundraising and marketing activities, you may wish to explore the effectiveness and best practices of such activities through collecting empirical data on this approach at an arts organization or through theoretical approaches. The research questions might include: What are some of the effective ways to incorporate social media into the marketing and fundraising efforts at an arts organization? Why is social media effective for arts organizations’ fundraising and marketing functions? What are some of the underlying theories for effective or ineffective social media marketing and fundraising strategies?

Students may also conduct a theoretical project; one that is not directly linked to a specific arts organization. In this case, the paper is often conceptual or historical.

Conceptual Paper. A conceptual/theoretical paper is based upon published literature and theoretical models. For this type of paper, no empirical data is utilized. Conceptual papers should include a research question and a thorough literature review on the topic or question being explored. For instance, a research question might be: “Why do people give to nonprofit organizations, and how can arts organizations take advantage of existing philanthropic motivations and theories?”

Historical Paper. A historical research paper uses published literature, primarily secondary sources. These papers should include a research question and a thorough literature review on the topic to be explored. The research might explore questions such as: “What were the reasons for the founding of American Federation of Musicians (AFM), Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI) and American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP)? What are the differences among these organizations? How do these organizations continue to serve their members?”
Registering for Capstone Course

AAD 750: Capstone Course in Arts Administration is what is called a “controlled enrollment” course. This means that students can only register for the course with approval from the Department. In order to gain approval, students must submit a Capstone Proposal Form which describes the project plan.

Capstone Proposal Form
The Capstone Proposal Form asks for basic student information plus:
  • Proposed project title
  • Project abstract and
  • Three-page project description
The form is available on the Current Students page of the Arts Administration website.

Capstone Proposal Deadlines
The Capstone Proposal Form must be submitted to the Arts Administration Director of Graduate Studies by specific dates in order to be considered for enrollment the following semester.

  Enrollment in Capstone in Spring Semester       November 1
  Enrollment in Capstone in Summer Semester      March 15
  Enrollment in Capstone in Fall Semester        July 15

Capstone Partnership Form
The Capstone Partnership Form is a different than the Capstone Proposal Form. Students completing a project that requires proprietary access to an arts organization’s information need the organization to approve of the activity. For instance, if the project involves creating a marketing plan for a real arts organization, the organization must acknowledge that they are aware of the project and approve of it. This form can be located on the Current Students webpage. This form should be submitted with the Capstone Proposal Form.

Before the Capstone Course
After students submit their proposals, they should keep reading! Students should come to the course having read all the literature that they need to cite in their project papers (minimum 15). Since the Capstone Course is focused on writing the paper and preparing the presentation, students should come as prepared as possible by reading as much as possible about their topic before the course begins. Faculty advisors may be a good resource when building reading lists.