

College of Arts and Sciences

Engaging the Heart, Mind and Spirit



Capstone Courses: \$250,000

Background

The College of Arts and Sciences is seeking \$250,000 to enhance the curriculum and student experience with **capstone courses**. A capstone experience is a class or project that seniors complete prior to graduating from USD. The purpose of the capstone course is to allow students to integrate their knowledge and experience in a manner that demonstrates evidence of critical thinking, information literacy, skillful writing, oral presentation, and provides an opportunity for meaningful civic engagement.

Depending on major, a capstone experience could be an immersion study-abroad trip, an in-the-field research project, comprehensive seminar course, or specialized advanced coursework, to name just a few.

Employers continue to tout the value of a liberal arts education, which creates informed, articulate, adaptable students. Former Procter & Gamble chairman A.G. Lafley believes, “The formula for businesses trying to compete in today’s economy is simple: hire employees with the mental agility, leadership and passion to navigate constant change — in other words, hire those who are liberally educated.”

Objective

While a variety of capstone classes in the form of senior seminars and research courses are already offered, the College of Arts and Sciences seeks to establish formal and consistent capstone experiences across all disciplines and for all students. The college wants every graduating senior to have a final capstone experience — regardless of major.

The following examples highlight how capstone courses act as a culmination of a student’s undergraduate education in one final course, project or experience. It is a partial list of potential capstone courses in the college.

Environmental and Ocean Sciences: The Environmental and Ocean Sciences department seeks to enhance its current Methods in Environmental and Ocean Sciences course to provide students with a more comprehensive capstone experience. The idea is to have students work on interdisciplinary projects and take ownership of a distinct piece of research. One student’s portion would integrate with another student’s as well as faculty members’ work, and then the complete work would be submitted for scientific publication.

This form of capstone has the potential to create long-term research projects and publications, as well as train a new generation of scientists. The capstone’s focus could change from year to year to provide greater impact for the students, the environment, and the communities.

Architecture: The architecture program wants to create two complementary senior capstones: a senior studio seminar and senior thesis in architecture. These capstones would enable students to refine their technical competency, understanding, critical thinking, social responsibility and creative synthesis. In both classes, students will be bringing all of their coursework together in the form of a final piece of work — building models, presenting their work, critiquing work, and defending their own projects. This combination of a studio seminar and senior thesis serves as the foundation for a student’s career in the field of architecture.

International Capstone: Building upon the South African immersion trip, the Department of Political Science and International Relations wants to establish a formal international capstone lab so that undergraduate students may have the opportunity to apply their knowledge, experience and skills in a location outside of the United States. Students would be involved in development projects where they would collaborate with local communities and engage in projects that directly meet the needs of the community. This global

experience would provide students with an opportunity to conduct field research and publish their findings alongside a faculty member.

Physics and Biophysics: The Department of Physics and Biophysics envisions a two-part capstone series that incorporates presentation training and practice with colloquia featuring invited distinguished guest speakers. Students would have the opportunity to learn about cutting-edge developments, technologies and milestones from experts in the fields of physics and biophysics, as well as how to discuss science with different audiences. This two-part capstone is the basis in preparing students for graduate school, or a successful career in the sciences.

Impact

Capstone courses are an essential way for the College of Arts and Science to assure that seniors are equipped with a well-rounded liberal arts foundation and practical real-world experience before they graduate. The goal is to provide all undergraduate students with applicable experiences that show how their degree — regardless of major — can be used in any profession to solve real-world problems after graduation.

For More Information

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