



Senior Capstone Experience Guidelines 2012-13

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Overview

The Business Management Capstone is an intensive academic project, guided by a faculty advisor, on a topic of the student’s choice. Successful capstones demonstrate the qualities of extensive research, critical thinking, careful analysis, and clear and effective writing. There is no set length, but most capstones are at least 50 pages long.

Grading. To complete the Capstone students enroll in the 4-credit Senior Capstone Experience (BUS SCE) course in the senior year. The Capstone receives a mark of Pass, Fail, or Honors.

Double majors. Students pursuing double majors should try to write integrated Capstones for both majors. This requires planning beginning in the junior year. When faced with timelines from two departments, students should expect earlier ones to take precedence. Double majors can only earn 4 total SCE credits, even if they write two Capstones. Students pursuing integrated capstones as part of a double-major may need to follow other departments’ guidelines and timelines.

Timeline

Special capstones may entail different deadlines, depending on the judgment of the faculty advisor. Capstones written for a double-major must meet deadlines for both majors.

	Strategy capstone	Business plan capstone	Special capstone
By ...			
Spring 2012			Students interested in special capstones, including double-majors, should speak with appropriate faculty
Monday, June 4		Expression of interest to Prof. Joe Bauer (jbauer2@washcoll.edu)	Expression of interest in a special capstone to Prof. Michael Harvey (mharvey2@washcoll.edu).
Monday, June 25		Application due to Prof. Bauer.	
Summer 2012	Familiarize yourself with companies and industries you are interested in; identify key industry publications or news sources.	Prof. Bauer will contact students to discuss their business plan ideas, including arranging a timeline suitable for the student's project.	Department chair or other faculty will contact students to discuss the nature of special capstones.
Friday, Sept. 14	Deadline for selecting a viable publicly-traded firm; deadline for requesting a specific advisor.		
October			Students doing research with interviews or surveys should submit research proposals to the Review Board for Research on Human Subjects
Monday, Dec. 3	Benchmark with brief explanation; concise industry description (noting complications for complex corporations, if applicable), with annotated list of key competitors.		
Monday, Feb. 4	Draft of ch. 2, including citations		
Monday, Feb. 25	Draft of ch. 3, including citations		
Monday, March 18	Draft of ch. 4, including citations		
Monday, April 1	Draft of ch. 1 and abstract, including citations		
Monday, April 8	Full draft of capstone, including tables, figures, appendices, submitted as a single file		
Monday, April 22	Complete polished final draft due		

Research Ethics

As part of writing the Capstone, students must conduct research in accordance with accepted scholarly and ethical standards, including providing good citations and references (citations are the in-text mention of a source; references are the complete bibliographic information at the end of the Capstone).

Central to ethical research is avoiding plagiarism. **Plagiarism is taking the words or ideas of others and presenting them as your own, and it is a failing offense.** You may not cut and paste sentences or passages from other texts and insert them into your own document, unless you alert the reader to this by a signal phrase, a citation, and quotation marks. Nor may you take ideas, even if you reword them, without citing the source. It is acceptable and expected to borrow and cite, but it is not acceptable to steal—that’s the bottom line on plagiarism.

Document Format: APA

The Capstone in Business Management follows a slightly modified APA format, the most common style for citations and document preparation in the social sciences. The Department has a handy guide to how to follow APA format; it can be accessed from the Department website, business.washcoll.edu.

As part of APA format, when you cite sources, the two components—the in-text **citation** and the full **reference** in the list of references at the end of the capstone—must follow APA formats. To see an example, here’s a side-by-side comparison of proper and improper citations (the in-text component) and references (the entry included in the list of References):

IMPROPER CITATION (Hoovers)	PROPER CITATION (Hoovers 2012)
IMPROPER REFERENCE Hoovers.com. (2012). Apple.	PROPER REFERENCE Hoovers. (2012). Apple Inc. Financial Summary. Retrieved from http://subscriber.hoovers.com/H/company360/financialSummary.html?companyId=1264400000000

The Department’s preferred format, however, varies slightly from APA format:

1. No running head, just page numbers in the top right corner.
2. Put one space after periods, not two.

Managing Your Research

Doing research on the Internet, it has been said, is like trying to drink from a firehose: the sheer volume of information available can be overwhelming. Miller Library’s reference librarians and web resources are a great starting point for figuring out how to manage your research. This page has links to a number of helpful websites and browser add-ons:

<http://millerlibrary.washcoll.edu/content.php?pid=98427&sid=753911>

Through the library, you can sign up for a free subscription to RefWorks, which lets you export citations from databases and automatically generate citations.

Primary research. Any primary research involving people, such as interviews or surveys, must be approved by Washington College’s Institutional Review Board for Research on Human

Subjects. You should discuss your research plan with your advisor. You can find more information about IRB guidelines at <http://academics.washcoll.edu/policyforresearch.php>

Honor Code. A Capstone must bear the Honor Code pledge, and be signed by the student. Violation of the code is grounds for immediate failure, and will be referred to the Honor Board. Your signature may be typed if this makes it easier to submit your capstone digitally to the library.

Sharing Capstone learning. As the final step in the research process, BUS Capstones will be electronically published in Miller Library's holdings, accessible to the college community. A completed Capstone should be submitted to the library via email, to sce@washcoll.edu, as a single PDF file. Any supplementary files such as images or Excel spreadsheets should be integrated into the master file before submitting to the library.

Three Capstone tracks

There are three tracks for the Senior Capstone in Business Management: the Business Plan Capstone, the Special Topic Capstone, and the Strategy Capstone.

Business Plan Capstone

Students interested in learning what goes into starting a business can get a head start on entrepreneurship by doing a **Business Plan Capstone**. This is a competitive capstone track limited to six seniors who will work closely and rigorously with a faculty advisor to generate a working business plan. Application occurs in May before senior year; these are the eligibility criteria:

- Good academic standing; WC GPA of at least 2.75; BUS GPA of at least 3.00.
- Completion of BUS 340 Intermediate Accounting, a course helpful for understanding the financial relationships common in operating a small business. [Note: for 2012-13 capstones, students are not required to have completed BUS 340, but may complete it during the 2012-13 academic year.]

Students interested in the Business Plan Capstone should notify the business plan faculty advisor, Prof. Joe Bauer (jbauer2@washcoll.edu), by the notification deadline in the timeline above.

After notifying the faculty advisor, interested students should prepare a complete application to do a business plan proposal in the form of a short, double-spaced, neatly prepared document with these required elements (researched or estimated):

- a. the business idea (description of the products/services)
- b. target market and known competitors
- c. initial financial requirements, for launch and for first-year operations
- d. pertinent current trends in the industry/business; growth potential
- e. description of your core competencies that will support the business
- f. what makes your idea/business unique
- g. what you view as the most severe risk(s) to opening and operating the business

Students submitting acceptable proposals will be interviewed by the capstone advisor to discuss ideas, career intentions, and anticipated time line to launch the business. Students accepted into the Business Plan program will enroll in the 4-credit Senior Capstone Experience (BUS SCE) in the fall of the senior year, and will work with the faculty advisor during the fall and the spring.

Special Topic Capstone

The **Special Topic Capstone** is a research-oriented project reflecting the student's interests and collaboration between the student and faculty advisor. Topics might include an integrated capstone (for double majors), a series of interviews in a particular industry or career path, a research study of a selected business or management topic, or empirical research tied to presentation at an academic conference. Students undertaking a Special Topic Capstone should work closely with the capstone advisor to develop guidelines for their particular projects.

Strategy Capstone

The **Strategy Capstone** is the most popular track. Because so many students undertake this track, there are restrictions on what firms can be chosen for the Strategy Capstone. Firms must be publicly traded, to ensure there will be sufficient financial information available. And firms studied within the past three years may not be chosen. The list of approved firms is kept by the Department secretary, Christy Rowan (crowan2@washcoll.edu). Students must have their requested firm approved by Ms. Rowan as a first step in completing the capstone.

The Strategy Capstone presents research, analysis, and recommendations on a firm's operations and strategy. In other words, in this capstone the student studies what a firm tries to do within its competitive environment, what it actually does, and how successful it is.

The Strategy Capstone is *not* a defense of the firm. Students who undertake to research a firm—especially if they spend a lot of time reading letters to shareholders, browsing the company's website, or scouring its press releases—sometimes make the mistake of acting as a spokesperson for the company in their capstone. This is not an appropriate perspective. Your role is to be an independent, objective source of information for investors. If you see problems, it is your duty to point them out. In fact, in the world beyond college, courage in calling out underperforming companies is a valuable and sought-after quality in business analysts. More broadly, moral courage, which includes the willingness to point out difficult truths and rely on your own honest judgment, is one of the College's and Department's core values.

The intended audience for the Strategy Capstone is the audience for any similar analysis of a firm and its industry: *potential investors*, either individuals or institutional investors. What do potential investors want to know, and what do they need to know, to make an informed investment decision about the firm? Keep your intended audience in mind as you write your capstone.

The Strategy Capstone draws primarily on research and analytic techniques students have learned over the course of the major. It draws on material in the core BUS courses: BUS 201 (reading financial statements), BUS 202 (marketing analysis), BUS 203 and 204 (or MAT 109) (quantitative methods), BUS 301 (analyzing financial data), BUS 302 (organizational dynamics and leadership), BUS 303 (legal environment of business), BUS 304 (management information

systems), and course BUS 401 (strategic management). In addition, good capstones should draw on knowledge gained from meeting the Global Learning requirement to view all of the above through an international perspective.

The Strategy Capstone consists of four chapters, plus an abstract, references, and optional additional material.

STRATEGY CAPSTONE **ABSTRACT**

The abstract comes first but gets written last. It is a summary of what you did *and what you found*: your argument in a nutshell, in 150 to 250 words. The abstract is the only part of your capstone that most people will read, so write it with care.

STRATEGY CAPSTONE **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 1 tells the reader what you're studying and provides useful information on how you did your research. Since it provides an overview, you will write it when you've written the rest of the capstone.

Topic. What you studied. A Strategy Capstone typically studies the past five years of a company's operations within its industry setting.

Assessment. How you define the firm's strategic success. To gauge the effectiveness of your company's generic and corporate strategies, you need a clear measure of assessment to apply against your company's performance. Hard numbers like net profit, earnings per share, and market share tend to be the best bottom-line assessments, especially when put in comparative perspective. If you wish to use an alternative metric or technique, for instance, a balanced scorecard, please explain.

Methods. How you conducted research. What sources did you use? (SEC.gov, S&P, Hoover's, business periodicals, interviews, etc.). How did you construct your benchmark? (What companies make up the benchmark? Why? Did you use a weighted average? Did you have to alter the benchmark over the four- or five-year span you are studying?) Did you employ any unusual methods, like interviews or attending trade shows? What complications did you encounter? How did you deal with them?

Industry Benchmark. The industry benchmark is the heart of your strategic analysis. It provides key data for measuring and evaluating the performance of the industry, and how your firm compares to its competitors. The point is that numbers without a basis for comparison don't tell much, whereas a sensible comparison with relevant firms and a good benchmark provide lots of insight into a firm's strategic success. You should complete your benchmark data gathering by the December deadline; this will give you more time in the spring to analyze your data. You'll find more information about the benchmark in the notes below on chapter 2.

Key Findings. A summary of your key findings and recommendations. A good plan is to provide a paragraph summary for each chapter, or you may make use of bullet points, if

convenient.

STRATEGY CAPSTONE

CHAPTER 2. ANALYZING THE INDUSTRY

As you learn in BUS 401, there are two fundamental levels of strategic analysis: industry-level analysis and company-level analysis. In other words, business strategists and observers study a firm and its competitive environment. Chapter 2 explores the competitive environment in detail. This includes more than the industry itself—it covers everything in the firm’s environment that affects its operations, from the economy and politics to the physical environment, technology, and demographics. But the focus is the industry, and you are expected to develop a good understanding of the industry your firm is in.

Industry Background (SIC or NAICS data; industry definition; history; current snapshot; recent changes or highlights)

Ethics and Current Events

A summary or selection of popular-press coverage over the past three to five years, with special attention to ethical issues. Choose topics that pertain to your key insights about the company, rather than just a grab-bag. In strong capstones, the topics covered in this section relate to the key points about the industry and are woven into a narrative that organizes and clarifies the key points.

Industry Benchmark

The industry benchmark serves as the basis for measuring and evaluating the performance of the industry. The benchmark consists of a weighted average (weighted by market capitalization or sales) of key firms in the industry (weights adjusted for each year of data). In particular, the benchmark will include the three to five competitor firms, as well as your chosen firm. The benchmark should be calculated over a four or five-year period (four years is the minimum amount of data you need: to compute a three-year Compound Annual Growth Rate [CAGR], for instance, you need four years of data). When you compile these and other numbers, usually you won’t wish to display more than one, or sometimes two, decimal places. Most students end up with tables of data presented in an appendix at the end of the capstone.

Sales and Market Share Growth Rates

You’ll use benchmark data to construct sales and market share growth rates. For most firms, the most recent available data will follow this 3-year CAGR formula for sales:

$$(2011 \text{ revenue} \div 2008 \text{ revenue})^{1/3} - 1$$

PESTEL (or similar framework)

The PESTEL analytic framework encourages a strategic overview of external environment characteristics. It covers six analytic areas:

- Political analysis
- Economic analysis
- Sociocultural analysis

- Technological analysis
- Environmental analysis
- Legal analysis

You don't have to follow this exact PESTEL format. As long as you cover these broad areas, you may organize this material as you wish. It's common, for instance, to combine political and legal analysis.

Porter's Five-Forces Model

Prof. Michael Porter's famous five-forces model, studied in BUS 401, helps identify the forces that determine the basic competitive structure of an industry:

- Rivalry
- Threat of entry and exit barriers
- Supplier power
- Buyer power
- Threat of substitutes

Strategic Group Map

The Strategic Group Map is difficult, but there is no obvious right answer or template to follow. Essentially, you use it to paint a picture that supports your story about the firm. What is special or distinctive, from a competitive and strategic point of view, about your firm? (This might be either positive or negative.) Try to craft a strategic group map that visually displays this distinctiveness.

It is especially important to avoid choosing metrics for the axes that are nothing but rough measures of, or dependent on, size—a strategic group map that slopes neatly at 45 degrees has most likely told us nothing interesting about the industry or the firm, except that all these measures increase as company size increases. (For firms in an industry with global competition, one useful metric is often percent of sales outside of North America.)

Summary

You should end up with a few key points about the company's external environment. Since you should be repeating, for emphasis, points you've made earlier in the chapter, you don't need to cite them as if they were new information. We recommend that you organize your summary in terms of key opportunities and threats or challenges facing the company. These will set the stage for the SWOT analysis you'll present in Chapter 4.

STRATEGY CAPSTONE

CHAPTER 3. ANALYZING THE FIRM

Chapter 3 focuses on the firm itself. This includes the firm's history, leadership, structure, and operations. (*Style note: remember that a firm is singular, not plural. Don't use "they" or "their" when talking about your company; use "it" and "its."*)

Company Background (history, vision and mission, snapshot of current operations, and recent events). Do NOT simply cut and paste the firm's mission statement. You should write this section as any other section, referring to the firm in the third person. If you quote from

the vision or mission statement, do so as with any other quotations, and avoid quoting too much. One common source of confusion here is that the student's voice disappears, and this section sounds like a press release from the firm. Here, as elsewhere in the Capstone, the reader expects to hear your voice researching and analyzing the firm, not serving as a mouthpiece for its press release efforts.

Ethics and Current Events

A summary or selection of popular-press coverage over the past three to five years, with special attention to ethical issues. The topics you choose to cover should relate to your key points about the firm and the industry.

Organizational Analysis

This section provides information on the company's management and organizational structure. Some possible questions:

What is the company's organizational structure? Is its structure common in the industry? How important have outsourcing, alliances, or joint ventures been to the company? What is the company's governance structure? (That is, how large is the Board; what percentage of Board members are outsiders?) How stable has the company's organizational structure been? How stable has senior leadership been?

Marketing Analysis

Use the four P's of marketing (product, place, price, and promotion) to assess the company's marketing performance.

Financial Analysis

This section addresses the following questions:

1. Has the company's financial performance been good or bad?
2. Is its financial position sufficient to fulfill its mission and goals?
3. How does its financial position compare with industry benchmarks?

Comprehensive Ratio Analysis

Using the benchmark you settled on, here you compare company performance to benchmark ratios over a four- or five-year period. Ratio analysis should include these elements, where pertinent:

1. **Cash flow analysis**, using margin evaluations normalized by sales (i.e, create a ratio of operating cash flow [or EBITDA] to sales).
2. **Liquidity**. Use the Current Ratio, which serves as a proxy for both liquidity and the firm's ability to pay off its short-term debt.
3. **Activity**. Analyze Asset turnover.
4. **Debt**. Analyze Debt Ratio and TIE (times interest earned) Ratio, which serves as a proxy for the firm's ability to raise longer-term debt funding.
5. **Profitability**. Compare operating margin, net profit margin, and ROA.
6. **Dividends**. Contrast yield and payout ratios.
7. **Market capitalization**.

Your analysis should include plentiful graphs (typically, over a five-year span, comparing the company to the industry benchmark) as well as sensible prose. Your prose should not merely describe your graphs, but help the reader use your graphical data to go deeper into the strategic analysis. For instance, it should note and provide reasons for any anomalies uncovered by the graphs (this would generally require further attention to financial statements).

Generic Strategy

Identify the firm's chief generic strategy for its lead products. How stable has this strategy been? Compare the company's generic strategy with industry norms, and assess its effectiveness. Note: you should tie this effectiveness of the firm's generic strategy to the success measure presented in chapter 1. This helps tie your analysis together. In practice, since you'll write chapter 1 after you've worked up the analysis here, that means that your analysis of the generic strategy here will help you select an appropriate success measure in chapter 1.

Corporate Strategy

Corporate strategy refers to how firms approach the problem of diversification; sometimes it is best understood as decisions about what portfolio of assets to hold. Thus it's a different kind of strategic concern than generic strategy, which focuses on one product or product line and seeks one clear way to obtain competitive advantage. Simple firms that only do one thing may not face the challenge of corporate strategy, but most publicly traded firms studied in strategy capstones have become complex and diversified enough that they do face this challenge. If this is relevant to your firm, identify its chief corporate strategy or strategies. Compare the company's corporate strategy with industry norms, and assess its stability and effectiveness.

Summary

You should end up with a few key points about the company's operations. Since you should be repeating, for emphasis, points you've made earlier in the chapter, you don't need to cite them as if they were new information. We recommend that you organize your summary in terms of the firm's key strengths and weaknesses. These will set the stage for the SWOT analysis you'll present in Chapter 4.

STRATEGY CAPSTONE

CHAPTER 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 4 begins by summarizing your research in a SWOT analysis, then looks to the future.

SWOT Analysis

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) is a powerful clarifying tool for strategic analysis. And the good news is that you've already done the analysis! At the end of Chapter 2 you presented key opportunities and threats in the company's external environment. At the end of Chapter 3 you presented the firm's key strengths and weaknesses. All you have to do now is put them together in a simple two-by-two matrix, like this:

	Positive	Negative
Internal	Strengths	Weaknesses
External	Opportunities	Threats

Each cell should have three to five items. A good SWOT analysis does not contain new information; rather, it highlights key points. If you find you want to make points in your SWOT that are not explicitly stated in previous chapters, then you need to go back to your earlier analysis and revise accordingly. The SWOT you present here in chapter 4 needs to restate the key points from the research and analysis you presented in chapters 2 and 3.

Confusion sometimes arises about what counts as an opportunity or threat. The distinction is in principle simple: strengths and weaknesses are internal, but *opportunities and threats are external*, something that by definition a firm does not control. For instance, strategic alliances with other firms or a new marketing program are internal, not external, because they represent choices a firm can make on its own initiative. Currency fluctuations, new entrants, or changes in customer buying habits are examples of external events beyond a firm's control. Of course, such external events can often elicit choices by the firm—for instance hedging for currency risk, acquiring a new competitor, or marketing changes) that could be analyzed as internal strengths and weaknesses.

Recommendations

After your SWOT analysis, you will make strategic recommendations, based on all your research and analysis, about your firm. Depending on what you and your advisor decide on, you will choose between two kinds of strategic recommendations (or, if you wish, do both):

(1) An internal recommendation to the firm's senior managers to make a significant organizational, operational, or strategic change. For this kind of recommendation, imagine that the firm has hired you to provide strategic consulting services. Provide a concise, data-driven recommendation or set of recommendations. The nature of your recommended change or changes will vary, of course, depending on your analysis. Likely areas for change include entry into or exit from a market, a different mode of market entry, corporate leadership, organizational structure, development of new infrastructure or adoption of new technologies, budgeting and planning, research, or other activities. If feasible, provide a quantitative analysis of the impact (costs and benefits) of your recommendation; if this is not feasible, specify the type of data you would need in order to project the impact, and to provide a reasonable model for analyzing the data.

(2) An external recommendation to investors to buy or not buy the firm's stock. Imagine that Washington College's Alex. Brown Investment Fund has asked for your recommendation on this firm's stock. Provide a concise, data-driven answer tied to the key

findings of your capstone (in other words, this is a good time to revisit your main findings and conclusions, in support of your recommendation).

Whichever recommendation path you choose, internal or external, one good test of whether you've done a good job with the recommendation is whether it cites key data and is aligned with the key findings of your capstone.

Charts, Images, and Supplementary Material

The Strategy Capstone and other Capstone tracks are enhanced by good, pertinent images, charts, and graphics. Some of these are required; others are optional. For instance, you may wish to include a map of the company's operations, a photograph of a factory or product, or pictures of senior leaders. If you wish to include other kinds of supplementary information, for instance a company's document that provides useful information on a product or service you discuss, this should go in an Appendix at the end of the Capstone. APA style includes guidance on charts, images, captions, and appendices.

Draft Chapters

At each deadline (see the timeline at the beginning of this document), a draft chapter is due. These deadlines are important, because they allow the faculty advisor to provide useful feedback, and allow time for revision. All submitted capstone work, including drafts, should follow APA guidelines. **It is important to include page numbers and citations in drafts**, to make it easier for the advisor and the student to share feedback. The advisor may ask for work in hard copy, electronic copy, or both.

Final Chapters

The final draft will include these items (some optional), each on a new page.

1. Title page
2. Honor Code page, with student signature (digitized for the electronic copy)
3. Copyright page (Optional)
4. Dedication page (Optional)
5. Acknowledgments (Optional)
6. Abstract
7. Table of Contents (please learn how to use Word's automatic table generator to manage pagination and tab alignment)
8. List of Tables (only used for five or more tables), with page numbers
9. List of Figures (only used for five or more figures), with page numbers
10. List of Symbols and Abbreviations (only if needed, for some special capstones)
11. Body of Capstone (divided into chapters; chapter titles do not need to be on a separate page)
12. References
13. Separation page (titled Appendix or Appendices (when applicable; page unnumbered)
14. Appendix or Appendices, including IRB approval or waiver, if needed

Assessing the Capstone (Pass, Fail, Honors)

Capstones receive a grade of Pass, Fail, or Honors. Capstones are assessed according to a department-wide rubric that looks at six elements: core principles, insightfulness, research, data analysis, writing quality, and mechanics. The total number of points possible in the rubric is 30. On each item, the rubric score can range from 1 to 5. Adding up the scores for the six elements provides the total Capstone score, as in this example:

A. Core principles	4
B. Insightfulness	3
C. Research	4
D. Data analysis	3
E. Writing quality	2
F. Mechanics	3
Total score	19 (Pass)

Pass and Fail. To earn a grade of “pass,” an SCE must receive an overall score of at least 15, and a score of at least 2 in each criterion. If an SCE earns an overall score of 14 or less, or if it receives a final score of 1 in any of the six criteria, it receives a grade of “fail.”

Honors. The Honors designation represents exceptional merit in a Capstone. To earn honors, an SCE must earn an overall score of at least 24 out of 30 on the rubric. Alternatively, a Capstone may receive Honors if it includes a satisfactory presentation at a scholarly conference. (Details on suitable conferences may be discussed with the Capstone advisor.)

Here is an explanation of each element in the rubric:

A. Core principles

Does the Capstone show understanding of the Department’s four core learning principles?

1. Critical thinking

Inquisitiveness: the discipline and patience to ask many questions; ability to look beneath superficial presentation of information and look for underlying patterns and dynamics; ability to pull significant details and specific facts into a cohesive, sensible and comprehensible understanding of a company’s strategic situation or other business topic.

2. Analytic reasoning

Quantitative reasoning, financial literacy and analysis, ability to understand internal and external complexities in a step-by-step fashion.

3. Written (and other forms of) communication

Clear writing that facilitates comprehension and action.

4. **Moral courage**

Ethical awareness; understanding of the opportunities and responsibilities of business leadership; willingness to ask hard questions and adopt an appropriate perspective (objective and skeptical) to one's topic.

In terms of these core principles, a superior Capstone reveals a rich understanding of the interconnections between critical thinking, analytic reasoning, communication, and moral courage. It should bring together good analysis, sharp awareness of the human side of enterprise, and a sense of key problems and questions.

- 5 **Excellent.** Broad, nuanced understanding and expression of core learning principles, especially critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and moral courage. Excellent integration of these into sound strategic analysis, with comprehensive understanding of organizational and environmental levels of analysis (including pertinent areas such as global, economic, political, cultural, and technological factors), and keen understanding of pertinent ethical dimensions.
- 4 **Good.** Good understanding and expression of core learning principles, especially critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and moral courage. Good integration of these into sound strategic analysis, with good understanding of organizational and environmental levels of analysis (including pertinent areas such as global, economic, political, cultural, and technological factors), and understanding of pertinent ethical dimensions.
- 3 **Average.** Fair understanding and expression of core learning principles, especially critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and moral courage. Some integration of these into sound strategic analysis, with some understanding of organizational and environmental levels of analysis (including pertinent areas such as global, economic, political, cultural, and technological factors), and some understanding of pertinent ethical dimensions
- 2 **Poor.** Partial understanding or expression of both analytic and interpersonal skills, with some significant gaps in these. Limited integration of these two skill areas into critical managing: significant gaps in strategic analysis, limited understanding of organizational and environmental levels of analysis, or limited understanding of ethical dimensions.
- 2 **Poor.** Partial understanding and expression of core learning principles, especially critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and moral courage. Limited integration of these into sound strategic analysis, with significant gaps in organizational and environmental analysis (including pertinent areas such as global, economic, political, cultural, and technological factors), and limited understanding of pertinent ethical dimensions.
- 1 **Lacking.** Little to no understanding and expression of core learning principles, especially critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and moral courage. Very limited integration of these into strategic analysis, with very limited understanding of organizational and environmental analysis (including pertinent areas such as global, economic, political, cultural, and technological factors), and little understanding of pertinent ethical dimensions.

B. Insightfulness

How insightful is the SCE? Does it generate new knowledge or insights on a significant topic?

In terms of insightfulness, a superior Capstone adds a measure of careful, original thinking on a significant topic.

- 5 **Excellent.** High-quality primary research: interviews, empirical studies, survey studies. Evidence of high quality as indicated by presentation at an academic conference or publication in a scholarly publication. Innovative thinking or conclusions.
- 4 **Good.** Good primary research; high-quality secondary research. Considerable insights or creative integration of data.
- 3 **Average.** Some new integration of data. Some useful insights.
- 2 **Poor.** Little new data or integration of data. Few useful insights. Most conclusions (not just raw data) copied from other sources.
- 1 **Lacking.** No new data or integration of data; no useful insights. Conclusions (not just data) copied from other sources with no value added.

C. Research

How well researched is the Capstone? Does it use a broad range of credible sources? Does it show familiarity with the conventions of academic research? Does it draw heavily on peer-reviewed research? Does it properly cite research?

In terms of research, a superior Capstone uses a broad range of pertinent, current academic and professional sources; provides accurate and complete citations; and shows good judgment in its choice of sources and citations.

- 5 **Excellent.** Very broad range of credible sources. Authoritative handling of the academic and professional literature that gives the reader confidence in the Capstone's argument and analysis. Accurate and helpful citation of sources that lets readers locate specific cited information.
- 4 **Good.** Good range of credible sources. Good handling of the academic and professional literature that gives the reader considerable confidence in the Capstone's argument and analysis. Accurate and helpful citation of sources that lets readers locate specific cited information.
- 3 **Average.** Fairly good range of credible sources. Reasonably good handling of the academic and professional literature. Accurate and helpful citation of most sources.
- 2 **Poor.** Relatively few credible sources. Heavy reliance on a few sources. Citations tend to be too general, and make it difficult for the reader to locate specific cited information.
- 1 **Lacking.** Few if any credible sources. Few if any helpful citations. Citations do little to help the reader locate specific cited information.

D. Data analysis

How well does the Capstone use data? How accurately and perceptively does it analyze the data it collects? How well does it present data in words, tables, and diagrams to help the reader understand the data? Are graphs and other visual presentations helpful, clear, and well designed?

In terms of writing, a superior Capstone uses clear, compelling, and accurate data; skillfully analyzes it; and presents the data in prose and graphics that capture the reader's attention and facilitate understanding.

- 5 **Excellent.** Throughout the SCE data is plentiful, clear, current, germane, and compellingly presented. Graphs, charts and other visual presentations are colorful and helpful. The SCE may even

use electronic appendices to augment its data richness. The SCE is clear (usually in chapter 1) about research methodology and the construction of benchmarks or other data points. Problems—gaps in data, difficulties locating key data—are identified and their impact on the project is assessed. Creative ways of locating hard-to-find data may be evident.

- 4 **Good.** For the most part, data is plentiful, clear, current, germane, and well presented. Graphs, charts, and other visual presentations are fairly helpful. The SCE is reasonably clear about research methodology and the construction of benchmarks or other data points.
- 3 **Average.** Most key data is presented. Most of it is clear, timely, and germane. Graphs are adequate, with no obvious errors or gaps in terms of data points, labels, or legends. Prose explanations or analyses help the reader make sense of data.
- 2 **Poor.** Data is relatively sparse, somewhat unclear, not as current as it could be, or occasionally off-topic. Some key data is missing. Graphs are inadequately labeled. Explanations or analyses of data are wordy and difficult for the reader to learn from.
- 1 **Lacking.** Data is sparse, unclear, old, and off-topic. Key data is missing. Graphs are inaccurate or inadequately labeled. Attempted explanations or analyses of data do little to help the reader.

E. Writing

How well written is the Capstone? Does it encourage the reader to keep reading? How well is the material organized? Is it adequately broken into chapters? Do the introduction and conclusion serve their purposes well? Within chapters, how well does the Capstone use paragraph structure to help the reader follow the argument? How coherent and cohesive are individual paragraphs? Does the Capstone use introductions, conclusions and transitions between logical units to help the reader?

In terms of writing, a superior Capstone is written clearly and concisely, in a style that emphasizes action and agency (clarity about “who is doing what”). It is clearly organized, chapter by chapter, section by section, and paragraph by paragraph.

- 5 **Excellent.** Very high degree of clarity; clear sense of agency. Action-oriented writing style. Professional language and jargon used when appropriate. Appropriate simplicity and concision to keep the reader’s attention. Very clear statement or suggestion of purpose occurring in or near the opening paragraph, when appropriate. Very effective development through support established by specific details, reasons, and/or examples. Effective sense of closure at the end of the composition, in light of the development that the writing has made. Effective transitions between paragraphs, coherence within paragraphs, and unity of whole composition, all where appropriate. Relationship between ideas is clear where such explicitness is called for.
- 4 **Good.** Good degree of clarity; good sense of agency. Much of the writing is in an action-oriented style. For the most part, professional language and jargon used when appropriate. Appropriate simplicity and concision to keep the reader’s attention. Clear statement or suggestion of purpose occurring in or near the opening paragraph, when appropriate. Effective development through support established by specific details, reasons, and/or examples. Effective sense of closure at the end of the composition, in light of the development that the writing has made. Effective transition between paragraphs, coherence within paragraphs, and unity of the whole composition, all where appropriate. Relationship between ideas is clear where such explicitness is called for.
- 3 **Average.** Reasonable clarity and agency. Some degree of wordiness, nominalizations, but many passages show appropriate simplicity and concision to keep the reader’s attention. Fairly clear

statement or suggestion of purpose occurring in or near the opening paragraph, when appropriate. Adequate development through support established by specific details, reasons, and/or examples. Adequate sense of closure at the end of the composition, in light of the development that the writing has made. Adequate transition between paragraphs, coherence within paragraphs, and unity of whole composition, all where appropriate. Relationship between ideas is clear where such explicitness is called for.

- 2 **Poor.** Much windy and wordy writing. Few efforts at simplicity or concision. Many nominalizations. Little attention to agency, or clarity about actions and actors. Attempt at statement or suggestion of purpose, though organizational scheme is only slightly evident. Little development of ideas; that is, little use of detail, reasons, and/or examples. Conclusion is at least suggested. Little evidence of transition, coherence, and unity.
- 1 **Lacking.** A preponderance of flat, pompous, windy, wordy writing. Confusion about agency. A profusion of being verbs, nominalizations, and shapeless, rhythmless sentences that defeat the reader's effort to pay attention. Weak attempt at statement or suggestion of purpose; organizational scheme is not evident. No development through use of detail, reasons, and/or examples. No conclusion. Absence of transition, coherence, and unity.

F. Mechanics

Does the Capstone follow professional expectations for academic writing in business management? Does it follow APA format?

In terms of mechanics, a superior Capstone adheres to rules of grammar, usage, and APA format.

- 5 **Excellent.** Excellent control of mechanics and usage—no errors in either. Appropriate manuscript conventions followed. Abstract, table of contents, table of figures, section heads, references, and other document formats accord with APA guidelines.
- 4 **Good.** Good control of mechanics and usage—perhaps two errors every seven or eight sentences. Appropriate manuscript conventions followed. Abstract, table of contents, table of figures, section heads, references, and other document formats accord with APA guidelines.
- 3 **Average.** Inadequate control of mechanics and usage—about three errors every seven or eight sentences. Some conformity to manuscript conventions. Abstract, table of contents, table of figures, section heads, references, and other document formats generally accord with APA guidelines.
- 2 **Poor.** Weak control of mechanics and usage—approximately 50% of the sentences contain mechanical and usage errors. Significant number of aberrations from APA guidelines.
- 1 **Lacking.** Very little control of mechanics and usage. Very little conformity to APA guidelines.

Writing and Style Guidelines

This is a brief listing of the most common stylistic pitfalls for students writing Capstones. Students will receive more detailed writing instruction from their individual advisors.

- As noted above, Business Management capstones should follow APA format with minor exceptions. See the section on APA format above.

- Watch your tone: you are a neutral observer and analyst, not a booster of the company. Your loyalty is to your own analytic independence, as well as the financial interests of your intended audience (potential investors). Be skeptical, critical, and sharp-eyed.
- Prefer the active voice to the passive voice, but don't consider this an absolute rule.
- Prefer "who-did-what" sentences to "there-was-a" sentences.
- Prefer active verbs to nominalizations (actions expressed as nouns):

Nominalization (weaker)

There was an **increase** of 23% in sales in the fourth quarter compared to the previous year.

Verb (stronger)

Fourth-quarter sales **increased** 23% over the previous year.

- Prefer short and strong words to big, mushy ones.
- Use lots of good, concrete examples: engage your reader's interest.
- A company is an "it," not a "they."
- The first person singular is acceptable. In most Capstones, it is most likely to be found in discussion of methodology ("I constructed," "I calculated," etc.).
- Keep numbers to one decimal place, unless additional precision is needed.
- Follow this number format: \$29 billion.
- Know the difference between dashes (–) and hyphens (-).
- Know how to cite and how to use terminal punctuation for quotations.
- Mechanical errors, typos, and sloppy proof-reading are not acceptable. They may be marked, but will not be corrected by faculty advisors.
- Consult Prof. Harvey's *Nuts and Bolts of College Writing* for elaboration on these points.
- You are encouraged to use the college's excellent Writing Center throughout the process of writing the Capstone. Students who do so typically evaluate the Writing Center's help highly, and produce better Capstones.