

Senior Capstone Experience: Presentation of Findings

As part of their senior capstone experience, students are required to complete a thirty-page research paper (worth 80 percent of their final thesis grade) and to present their findings in one of two formats (worth 20 percent of the grade): as either (1) an oral poster session or (2) in a condensed, written format (as both a three page written synopsis and op-ed style piece).

Students who have not completed the thesis by February 15 (with a C or better grade) will not be eligible to present their findings in a poster session and must complete option 2.

The FINAL DEADLINE for those students who did not earn a C or better on the thesis is March 7.

Students who have selected the poster option will participate in a symposium on April 7, 2013 at 7:00pm in the McClain Atrium in Toll Science Center. Those who have selected the short-form writing project must submit those to their advisors no later than 4:30pm on April 7. **NO GRACE PERIOD WILL BE GRANTED UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.** Regardless of which option majors choose, all seniors are required to attend the symposium. Please plan accordingly, as there will be no exceptions.

Option 1: Poster Session

What is a Poster Session?

A Poster Session is an advertisement for your research. It combines text and graphics to make a visually pleasing presentation. Your poster should quickly and efficiently communicate your research to viewers. Poster Sessions allow you to present data and conduct extended discussions of your research with others. Additionally, you will give short presentations on your research every few minutes.

The goal of the poster is twofold: 1) present the research; and 2) present an argument for the validity and importance of the research.

Posters must include an abstract, the research questions/problems, methodologies, results summarized, and conclusions. Under these headings, though, be sure to include focused information.

Writing Strategies for Poster Sessions

A poster requires careful planning about **how** to depict specific information and providing text and graphics to capture your audience's attention. Students should work with their advisers on several versions of the presentation to finalize what material is included and what material is excluded.

The final material that goes on a poster is quite unlike what most researchers and writers generally write for other contexts. The poster session calls for much more attention to visual impact than other forms of writing do. The restricted space of a poster requires careful condensing of ideas that we would write about at length for other forums.

Unlike your thesis, which is at least 30 pages, a standard poster session will include only about 3-4 pages of single-spaced text or graphics in 12-point font (i.e., before formatting for the poster). This means you must focus as narrowly as possible on the central ideas you need to convey. You won't have room to explain relationships among ideas in any detail, so pick out what's central to your topic and concentrate on that narrow focus.

The language on posters needs to be succinct. You will need to give careful consideration to the information that you include on your poster. You will also want to think about how to best depict it. The most effective posters utilize a combination of text and graphics. In general, a poster graphic should speak for itself. A title or heading helps the audience understand its content, but overall you should keep written explanations to a minimum.

Students will present their research projects on a series of 10-12 PowerPoint Slides, mounted onto “life size” poster boards in the McLain Atrium.

TIPS for the Poster Session:

Use graphics whenever you can on a poster.

Use text to convey key points.

Make your text easy to read by putting together information in bullets, lists, or short paragraphs and use clear headings throughout.

Avoid long blocks of text.

Consider the visual attractiveness of your poster. Use color in the poster and a greater contrast between heading and text fonts.

Look at your poster from a distance. Can you read it? Your poster

title or topic could be displayed in 72-point font, for instance, with headings throughout the poster in 48-point font.

Avoid italics or elaborate script fonts.

Use a single font.

Provide supplemental handouts that viewers can take with them to review later.

Always look at trial printouts of the poster text before you decide that you don't need any more revisions for clarity and readability.

Remember: we track vertically from center to top to bottom, and horizontally from left to right. This means that you should put the most important message in the center top position followed by the top left, top right, bottom left, and finish in the bottom right corner.

Space is important in a poster: without it, your reader has no visual pauses to think.

Students will be given a letter grade based on how well they meet the following criteria in the poster session:

1. Is **the aesthetic presentation** clear and coordination?
2. Does the student provide **a clear abstract** that summarizes the student's main argument and findings?
3. Does the student's **introduction** make a compelling and clear introduction that spells out the major research question under study
4. Does the student situate the research questions or paper's focus within a compelling **body of literature**?
5. Does the student easily explain the **methods** used to complete the research study?

6. Are the **major findings** easy to understand and not too lengthy?
7. Is there a concise and well-developed **discussion and conclusion**?
8. Are **sources properly cited** (located as footnotes on the individual slides where appropriate)
9. Does the **student ably present their findings orally** when asked questions?

Option 2: Written Synopsis and Op-Ed

Students who opt not to present a poster session will present their findings in two written formats: (1) a three-page written synopsis that should take on the characteristics of an executive summary and (2) an opinion editorial or op-ed of 1,000 words or less.

TIPS for the Written Synopsis/Executive Summary

An executive summary/written synopsis is a brief summary of the entire research paper and should be no more than three pages (double-spaced). These are typically written for larger research reports, whether in the social sciences, in business, or the hard sciences. In a real world setting, such summaries are often the only thing that people read, so you want to ensure that your synopsis not only capture the essential elements of your senior capstone's findings, but that it is short and to the point.

Students will be given a letter grade based on how well they meet the following criteria in contemplating their executive summary:

1. Does the student use plain language and avoid jargon?
2. Does the student use short and concise paragraphs?
3. Does the student clearly define the research question(s),

methods, and findings? Does the student then convince the reader that s/he has answered the question(s) in the summary?

4. Does the student use graphics, points and headings if it makes the document easier to read?

Here's a great example of an Executive Summary, written by the Public Religion Research Institute, which recently published a report on how religion impacts attitudes on capitalism and economic policy:

<http://publicreligion.org/research/2013/07/economic-values-survey-07-2013/>.

TIPS for the Op-Ed

Opinion editorials are brief articles that express the opinions or viewpoints of the author of the piece. Traditionally, such opinion pieces faced the opposing page of a newspaper editorial in a traditional newspaper. Unlike traditional news stories or a written synopsis of a piece, this article is designed to be normative or to express your point of view. Common types of op-eds express support or opposition to a public policy or explain a political phenomenon using a new perspective or new use of data, for example. Although the sizes of op-eds range, they usually average about 750 words.

Students will be given a letter grade based on how well they meet the following criteria in contemplating their op-ed:

1. Does the student use plain language?
2. Does the student limit the op-ed to 1,000 words or less?
3. Does the student make a single point and convey this main message in a sentence or two at the top or near the top of the piece?

4. Does the student indicate why readers should care about the topic?
5. Does the student offer a concrete policy prescription, if possible, or relate how your research applies to the “real world”?
6. Does the student use short sentences and paragraphs?
7. Does the students use a colorful example if appropriate?
8. Does the student use active voice?

(Note: some points adopted from Duke University’s Office of Communication’s “How to Write an Op-Ed Article.” See http://newsoffice.duke.edu/duke_resources/oped)

As an example, here is an op-ed written Dr. Deckman, published on the Public Religion Research Institute’s Blog:

<http://publicreligion.org/2012/10/the-gops-woman-problem/>.

Here is another example from Dr. Oros, published in the *Korean Times*:

http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/09/113_73395.html