The Integrative Capstone at Granite State College

Every bachelor’s major at Granite State College requires an integrative capstone, which is an educational experience undertaken following the completion of all other courses in the major. GSC defines the integrative capstone as a synthesis of the learning in the major with current research in the field to reach a new, higher level of understanding. Students are asked to integrate and apply learning, to demonstrate knowledge and skills acquired in the major, and to communicate their learning effectively.

The Integrative Capstone: Structured Majors

Students in structured GSC majors, such as Business Management or Psychology, take a course designed to provide a framework and resources, including faculty expertise, for them to develop individual projects that will demonstrate the synthesis of their learning from the major with current research or scholarship in the field.

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The Integrative Capstone: Individualized Studies

Rather than take a catalog course, students in the Individualized Studies major meet the integrative capstone requirement by doing an Independent Learning Contract (ILC) with a faculty member who has expertise in the student’s area of inquiry.

The Integrative Capstone: Flexible & Rewarding

The Independent Learning Contract can take any number of different forms to meet the outcomes for the integrative capstone, from a twenty-page research paper to an internship to a real-world business plan for a local start-up. Other examples of IS integrative capstones include work-related proposals for programs and improvements and case studies.

The integrative capstone also affords students the opportunity to gain a greater awareness and better understanding of the larger context for their academic and professional development and to use this awareness and understanding to their advantage in their own lives.

Additionally, the integrative capstone can be designed to meet the following purposes:

- Unify a fragmented educational history.
- Serve as a bridge or springboard to a graduate program, a new profession, or advancement in a current profession.
- Use an in-depth exploration of a personal area of interest as a representative example of one or more key concepts in the area of study.
- Facilitate a broader understanding of the area of study by taking an interdisciplinary approach to its key concepts.

The Integrative Capstone and Your Goals

When the time comes for you to start thinking about your integrative capstone, after you have completed all of the other courses in your major, it is useful to go back to the personal learning outcomes you developed in SDLR 550 Individualized Studies Seminar (or to your Personal Learning Mission if you developed your IS proposal in CRIT 502 Connecting to Your Major) and reflect on whether you have met these goals, whether they have changed, and how your integrative capstone might relate to these goals.

The Integrative Capstone: Must-Haves

Program Outcomes

All integrative capstones for the Individualized Studies major must meet the following program outcomes. It will be the responsibility of the Director of Individualized Learning and your assigned
faculty mentor to ensure that these outcomes are met, but please keep them in mind as you develop your proposal! You should also take into account the personal learning outcomes you developed in SDLR 550 for your Individualized Studies major.

1) Demonstrate proficiency as a self-directed learner by choosing an appropriate topic and developing specific learning outcomes reflective of the general learning outcomes for the integrative capstone.

2) Demonstrate proficiency in the methods of inquiry pertinent to the primary discipline of the Individualized Studies major.

3) Demonstrate proficiency in the use of information resources for the primary discipline of the Individualized Studies major.

4) Demonstrate an understanding of the existing body of knowledge pertinent to the topic and the theoretical framework upon which it is built.

5) Reflect on and synthesize prior learning in the major with current research or scholarship in the field to reach a new, higher level of understanding.

**Literature Review**

To take into account the current research in the field, every integrative capstone for a research-based discipline, such as psychology, management, and criminology, must include a literature review. For humanities-related disciplines, such as English and history, an equivalent review of the current scholarship will be required. The purpose of the literature (or scholarship) review is to provide you with an awareness of the larger professional or scholarly conversations currently taking place about your chosen area of inquiry.

**Integrative Paper**

The integrative capstone requires an integrative paper with a bibliography appropriate for the discipline. The purpose of the integrative paper is for you to explain the relationship of your literature review/scholarship findings to your integrative question. The actual form your integrative paper will take will be determined by the primary academic discipline for your focus area and the nature of your project. In the case of a work-related project or proposal, for example, the integrative paper could serve to provide the rationale for each of the decisions you made as you developed your proposal. If your project is producing a portfolio of creative nonfiction, then your integrative paper might be a discussion of the current state of creative nonfiction from the perspective of both higher education and the publishing industry. Please see page 8 of these guidelines for a model outline for the integrative paper.

**New Learning**

Prior learning cannot be used to meet the requirement for the integrative capstone.
Building Your Framework

While faculty build the framework for courses, students build the framework for Independent Learning Contracts. For the integrative capstone in Individualized Studies, you will build your ILC framework by developing an integrative question—that is, what one overarching question do you want your integrative capstone to answer by the time you’ve finished it? You will then identify the questions that you will need to find answers to in order to answer your integrative question. These questions, together with your integrative question, will form the foundation for your ILC. You will develop your framework by responding to the following series of prompts in an online WordPress template set up for this purpose:

- Post the personal learning outcomes you developed for your IS major in SDLR 550 or CRIT 502 and write a brief reflection on whether you have met these goals, whether your goals have changed, and how you see your integrative capstone relating to these goals.

- Write a brief summary of the focus area you're interested in exploring and its relation to your degree. Then write a brief summary of your current knowledge in this focus area.

- What one overarching question do you want your integrative capstone to answer by the time you've completed it? What is the working title of your project?

- What questions will you need to find answers to in order to answer your integrative question? List between 3 and 5.

- Briefly describe how you anticipate finding the answers to your questions, including where you expect to find the information you will need.

- Identify the form that you expect your learning contract to take. Are you thinking in terms of writing an in-depth research paper, developing a work-related project or proposal, undertaking a field-based capstone with specific, articulated goals?

- List a minimum of three peer-reviewed journal articles you have already identified as relevant to your integrative question. Be sure to use the style guide for the discipline of your focus area (APA or MLA). Once you have the articles identified, feel free to include any other resources you've identified, such as web sites of professional organizations or experts in the field.

- How would you structure your proposed ILC with assignment due dates to give you the best opportunity to complete it successfully?
• From your personal perspective, what benchmarks other than grades will you use to determine how successful you are in meeting the goals that you have set for your integrative capstone?

Your faculty mentor will provide support for your ILC framework by developing appropriate assignments, identifying resources, and providing the grading criteria by which he or she will evaluate your work. In addition, your faculty mentor will finalize due dates and communication expectations for your integrative capstone.

Proposal Template

A template for your proposal for the Integrative Capstone will be set up using the WordPress blog platform. The template will include the questions listed above. You will simply respond to each question in the Comments box below it. The blog structure allows for interactivity with the Program Director for Individualized Learning and your assigned faculty mentor during the proposal development and approval process. Once the proposal is approved and the Registrar’s Office has registered you for your ILC, a Moodle course shell will be automatically created; your faculty mentor will determine whether to use the shell throughout the term to manage your ILC.

Examples of Integrative Questions

• **American & European History**: What were the generational impacts of the American Civil War on communities in the North and in the South as demonstrated by an examination of four representative communities?
• **Applied Technology/Management**: How can I use the current research in leadership and team-building to meet my professional goals and the goals of my organization?
• **Business Management/Marketing**: How can an analysis of famous marketing campaigns be used to develop an effective marketing campaign?
• **Communications**: What is the impact of our increasingly technology-based, media-saturated society on interpersonal relationships, including intimate relationships within families, romantic relationships, and in the workplace?
• **Dramatic Literature & Theory**: How can Elizabethan theatre, such as *Titus Andronicus*, be effectively staged for a 21st century audience?
• **Emergency Medical Services**: What are the costs and benefits of having a private EMS service in a municipality instead of a fire-based ambulance service?
• **Fire & Emergency Services Administration**: How can handheld information technology devices, such as iTouch and Zune, be integrated into daily fire service operations to improve system efficiency, customer service delivery, and crew safety?

• **Human Services**: What has research shown to be the characteristics of effective programs to serve homeless military veterans in rural areas such as Sullivan County, New Hampshire, and how can I use my research findings to be an effective advocate for this population?

• **Human Services Administration**: How can human services organizations raise the awareness of families with children of the services available in their area in the event of an epidemic, a biological attack, or a natural disaster?

• **Industrial Arts/Technology Education**: What is the relationship between the other courses in the high school curriculum, such as English, math, and science, and Industrial Arts/Technology Education, and how can this relationship be used to develop an effective curriculum in Industrial Arts/Technology Education?

• **International Affairs**: How can an examination of the developing democracy of Kurdistan be used to assess the relative success of this process in a very inhospitable environment for democracy, such as the Middle East?

• **Language Arts & Literature**: What can be learned about the impact of women’s writing on the women’s equality movement by an in-depth study of Virginia Woolf?

• **Literature & Writing**: What are the values of the different writing genres in addressing a single subject, such as grief?

• **Non-profit Management & Eldercare**: Are the "tools" provided by the “Powerful Tools for Caregivers” program adequate help for caregivers to improve self-efficacy and is the program well marketed in Seacoast NH?

• **Political Science & Journalism**: What has been the impact of the media on the political process, both historically and currently, particularly the role television has played in affecting public opinion?

• **Program Design & Evaluation in Adult Learning**: How can the Interactive and Participatory Approaches be used as an effective means for promoting acquisition of a second language?

• **Public Safety Administration**: Can developing a social media presence be an effective tool for law enforcement?

• **Studies in Holistic Health**: How can a modern picture of spiritual consciousness be created, based on research in neuroscience?

**The Faculty Mentor**

A faculty mentor with expertise in the discipline of your integrative capstone will be assigned by Academic Affairs. Because of the number of factors involved in faculty teaching assignments,
please do not approach a faculty member directly and ask him or her to mentor the learning contract for your integrative capstone. You’re welcome to indicate a preference for a faculty mentor when you submit your ILC proposal to Academic Affairs for approval.

**Internships**

To meet the requirements for the integrative capstone, an internship (or other field experience) will have an accompanying academic component. A good way to ensure appropriate integration of the two components is to build the integrative capstone around an integrative question that lends itself to being addressed through both field experience and current research in the focus area. GSC has no set format for internships except that an intern must spend a minimum of eight hours a week at the internship site. To ensure that students are able to make the best use of a field experience for the integrative capstone, they are encouraged to develop some specific goals that they want to accomplish with the internship and keep a reflective journal while they’re doing the internship.

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**Important Note about Projects Involving Human Participants**

Any integrative Capstone that involves human participants, such as an internship or the collection of survey data, must be approved in advance by GSC’s Institutional Review Board to ensure that federal guidelines for the protection of human participants in research are met. Guidelines and the required forms can be found in MyGranite at [http://my.granite.edu/human-participants-and-institutional-review-board-irb](http://my.granite.edu/human-participants-and-institutional-review-board-irb).

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*Scroll down for “Model Outline for Integrative Papers.”*
Model Outline for Integrative Papers

Section I Introduction
The introduction should identify the focus of your integrative capstone and explain the relevance and importance of it to your major. You should provide an overview of the paper and any project associated with it.

Section II Selective Literature Review
In this section, you will provide a selective review of the relevant theory and/or research in the field that highlights the issues surrounding your project and supports its selection as your integrative capstone. You should cite all references in a standard style, e.g., APA (American Psychological Association) or MLA (Modern Language Association).

Section III Description of the Paper
Most learners will choose a project from one of the following examples:
- Research: Describe method of collecting data and results.
- Develop a Product/Plan: Present the product/plan in enough detail to make it clear to the reader (e.g., handbook, program, business plan, curriculum).
- Practicum/Internship: Describe the experience.
- Literary or Historical Study: Provide an in-depth discussion of the focus of the study (e.g., a literary genre, an author, the impact of a historical period on an author or works, etc.).
- Artistic Endeavor: Art show, performance (e.g., production of a play, write a book) or provide a photo-journal, the script, or the book.

Section IV Analysis/Discussion/Rationale
In this section, you will integrate sections I, II and III by discussing the paper in light of the research you presented in Section II (literature review) and the original purpose you identified in Section I (introduction).

- For research and/or a practicum/internship, you will analyze the results and/or the experience by comparing and contrasting the research that supports and/or differs from your findings, observations and/or experience.

- For a product/plan, you will provide a rationale based on the experts and literature in the field that supports your product/plan. In other words, your product/plan should be well grounded in the theory/research/expertise of the field.

- For a literary or historical study, you will provide supporting evidence to explain how experts’ views support or differ from your analysis of your project.

- For an original creation in art, literature, music etc., you will discuss why and for whom the work was created, possibly comparing and contrasting the work to the work of others and/or providing a critique of your creation.
Section V Reflections and Conclusions
In this final section of your paper, you reflect on the meaning of the whole experience. You may raise unanswered questions and/or offer directions for further study. You may hypothesize about alternative approaches that you might have taken to your project. You may explain how you integrated learning across your studies in this focused project. Finally, you will evaluate the outcome/effectiveness of your work and draw final conclusions.