

Communication Capstone

Fall Semester 2008

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Objectives

- Create a comprehensive communication-related capstone project based on knowledge and skills acquired through education and experience as a communication student.
- Gain understanding of the complex media environment in which students graduating in communication will work through investigation of the web and convergence media.

Comments: the objectives above are complementary. Students in this class need to realize material they prepare as a professional media practitioner will likely have some relationship to web technologies.

What you'll need

- Bender, Sharon L., *Producing the Capstone Project* (Dubuque: Kendall Hunt), 2003.
- Gauntlett, David and Ross Horsley, *Web studies*. 2nd ed. (London: Edward Arnold), 2004.

Attendance

The instructor intends to present this class as an advanced-level seminar. Attendance is essential. Students need to come prepared to ask questions and discuss assigned material, as informed discussion is vital to the vibrant experience of a seminar.

The instructor realizes that students sometimes face unforeseen emergencies that may require them to miss a seminar or class. Course policy is to allow one "free skip" for any reason. Beyond this students must realize that their missing the discussion may lower their class grade.

What is a seminar?

Students who enroll in a **class** may expect to receive a syllabus specifically describing the material that class will cover, how and when it will be covered, and activities throughout the semester. The class instructor will take primary responsibility for preparing and relaying this information to students, through lectures, films, field trips and other activities, and specific assignments. Examinations will usually be administered to evaluate student progress and establish a final grade.

A **seminar**, on the other hand, shares the educational experience among students and instructors. Professors facilitate discussion based on their own knowledge and study of a topic, but seldom offer long lectures or other formally structured lesson plans and assignments. Learning is instead based on participation of each student. Students will be expected to do their own research on topic ideas to be covered at class meetings, offer essays or other written work in support of those ideas, and lead or facilitate group discussions of those topics. In addition to facilitating class discussions, instructors may provide tutorials and evaluation of written work. But the knowledge and insight taken from a seminar relies on preparation and enthusiasm of everyone who takes part.

Because the seminar approach asks students to pursue research, writing and discussion of topics through their own initiative, enrollment is usually limited to motivated and mature participants, either high-achieving undergraduates or graduate-level students. Ancient universities such as Cambridge (the instructor's alma mater!) and Oxford, as well as American "Ivy League" universities, favor the seminar style as a pinnacle of higher education. Truly it is the bright and fortunate undergraduate at NDSU who experiences the challenge—and fun!—of seminar-style learning.

Course requirements and grading

Grades will be based on class participation, written work, and the capstone project. There will be no examinations. Students will be asked to present a capstone project based on extensive study of a topic relating to their planned career or special knowledge. Students, working with a colleague, also will be expected to do in-depth research and be ready to facilitate a discussion of one web studies topic during the semester. This work will also be prepared in written (or preferably web-based) form for grading. Other students will come prepared to discuss the topic based on text chapters or topics as chosen by the class.

Please note that reference lists, essays, web sites, and other written work must be typed, double-spaced, and reasonably free of spelling and grammar errors.

Class participation: All students will be expected to attend class, and to be prepared to discuss the week's topic. Students will receive a mid-semester evaluation of their class participation for reference.

Grading

The final grade will be based on:

Special topic preparation and presentation (with colleague): 100 pts.

Capstone project: 350 pts.

Class participation: 75 pts.

Other class activities: 25 pts.

Total: 550 pts.

Point total may change slightly depending on material assigned during the semester. Grading will be standard point-count based on a percentage: 90-100 percent=A, 80-89 percent=B, etc.

More about the capstone project

A “capstone” or senior project can take many forms, depending on the expectations of the instructor and abilities of the student. In general the text explains that it ought to apply knowledge and skills through work for an actual organization, community or industry. In communication this could mean a public relations plan, interpretive journalism project, photo documentary, video presentation, advertising campaign, commercial web site, or even a combination.

This instructor also believes it could be a formal research investigation of a communication topic, written as scholarly research. A student who plans to continue her education at the graduate level might find this appealing.

As the book describes, it also could be an undertaking designed to answer a question or address a real problem in a workplace or community. This means students have quite a lot of flexibility in choosing an area that interests them. But they do have to consider constraints:

- A capstone must be related to communication studies and skills. In other words, if you like horses and BMX racing, that’s fine, but comparing, say, accident rates among BMX races and horse riders would not be a capstone, because it has no clear communication aspect.
- A capstone must be an extended project that goes beyond your everyday experience. You may be writing articles for the *Spectrum* or your local newspaper, and that’s great, but a capstone must take these skills to a larger project, such as a multimedia web site or interpretive journalism.
- A capstone is not a professional portfolio. It might be used as part of a portfolio, but a capstone is a new project designed to show what you can do, not what you’ve already done.
- A capstone is not an assigned project based on specific requirements made by an instructor. As an advanced student, you are expected to conceive and launch the project with an understanding of the requirements and problems you’ll face as a communications professional. The instructor will review and advise, but not manage details.

According to Bender (pp. 52-60), these aspects should be included in a capstone project:

- cover page;
- table of contents;
- project title and overview;
- project objectives, that is, what you set out to accomplish;
- project design, that is, how you propose to accomplish your objectives;
- research, that is, background on what others have done in your area;
- risk management, that is, how you assessed roadblocks to completion of your project;
- project evaluation;
- appendices.

This list may need to be revised, depending on the nature of your capstone project. Every project submitted for grading, however, will obviously need a cover page, contents, overview, objectives, design, and research. Other aspects may include results or outcomes, or product resulting from the project.

Tentative Schedule

Week One (August 25)

Introduction. Discuss syllabus. Student and instructor introductions. Choose colleagues for web studies presentations. Brainstorm capstone possibilities. Introduce web technologies. Readings: Bender, pp. 1-48; Gauntlett and Horseley, pp. 3-33, plus chapter based on class choice.

Monday, Sept. 1: Labor Day, no class.

Week Two (Sept. 8)

Capstone project proposal draft due; discuss choices in class. Discuss assigned web studies chapter. Readings: Bender, 49-60; Gauntlett and Horseley, 34-48, plus chapter based on class choice.

Note: Instructor must approve your capstone choice before you begin work on your topic.

Week Three (Sept. 15)

Final capstone proposal due (about five pages). Discuss assigned web studies chapter. Readings: Bender, 61-86; Gauntlett and Horseley, chapter based on class choice.

Week Four (Sept. 22)

Discuss assigned web studies chapter. Readings: Gauntlett and Horseley, chapter based on class choice.

Week Five (Sept. 29)

Discuss assigned web studies chapter. Readings: Gauntlett and Horseley, chapter based on class choice. Discuss progress on capstone projects.

Week Six (Oct. 6)

Discuss assigned web studies chapter. Readings: Gauntlett and Horseley, chapter based on class choice.

Week Seven (Oct. 13)

Discuss assigned web studies chapter. Readings: Gauntlett and Horseley, chapter based on class choice.

Week Eight (Oct. 20)

Discuss assigned web studies chapter. Readings: Gauntlett and Horseley, chapter based on class choice.

Week Nine (Oct. 27)

Discuss assigned web studies chapter. Readings: Gauntlett and Horseley, chapter based on class choice.

Week 10 (Nov. 3)

Discuss assigned web studies chapter. Readings: Gauntlett and Horseley, chapter based on class choice. Student presentations and discussion of progress made/problems faced with capstone projects.

Week 11 (Nov. 10)

Discuss assigned web studies chapter. Readings: Gauntlett and Horseley, chapter based on class choice.

Week 12 (Nov. 17) Discuss assigned web studies chapter. Readings: Gauntlett and Horseley, chapter based on class choice.

Week 13 (Nov. 24) Discuss assigned web studies chapter. Readings: Gauntlett and Horseley, chapter based on class choice. If you wish, you may present a preliminary draft of your capstone project for instructor evaluation.

Week 14 (Dec. 1)

Capstone presentations in class.

Week 15 (Dec. 8)

Capstone presentations in class. All written capstone projects are due the day after this presentation, Tuesday, Dec. 9.

We shouldn't have to remind you that...

Work in this course must adhere to the NDSU Code of Academic Responsibility and Conduct. This addresses cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, or facilitating dishonesty. Instructors have the right to respond to a student's dishonesty by failing the student for the particular assignment or test, or even the entire course, or recommend the student drop the course.

Note: If you need special accommodations for learning, please let the instructor know as soon as possible.

