Summary of Key Points from "Developing Capstone Experiences"
University of Melbourne, Centre for the Study of Higher Education
Annie Holdsworth, Kim Watty and Martin Davies

What is a capstone?

The term capstone is used to describe a course or experience that provides opportunities for a student to apply the knowledge gained throughout their undergraduate degree. This involves integrating graduate capabilities and employability skills, and occurs usually in the final year of an undergraduate degree.

Capstone experiences are varied and may consist of experiences that:

- illustrate a student's skill development
- provide experiences that broaden a student's understanding of the work environment
- connect students to the communities they will be engaged with and contribute to in the future

Capstone experiences can be designed to address:

- Connecting discipline-specific curriculum to general education objectives
- Assisting students to reflect on and demonstrate what they have learnt over the course of their degree
- Relating discipline-specific learning outcomes to the world of work
- Providing a forum for students to participate in interdisciplinary activities
- Enabling students to reflect on and imagine personal, social, emotional and practical issues of transition beyond the university into the world of work
- Providing a bridge between final year of an undergraduate degree and graduate programs and lifelong learning
- Directly engendering the development of graduate capabilities that employers are searching for in graduates
- Linking undergraduate students to employers and employment arenas
- Connecting graduates to alumni in their chosen fields
- Linking major subject students to another discipline

Capstone experiences should be designed to provide students with activities that synthesize discipline specific knowledge, such as communication skills, with the ability to apply this knowledge to real world scenarios. Capstone subjects are subjects that are integrated into the curriculum.

The key features of a capstone subject can be summarized as follows:

- Free-standing and authentic or "real-life"
- Involving out-of-class events as a component of existing courses
- Involving skill-development leading to work readiness and/or entry into graduate studies

Knowledge Transfer

Knowledge transfer refers to engagement of the university with external communities. Melbourne's capstone model is based on the idea that knowledge transfer develops intellectual capital through two-

way beneficial interactions between the University and non-academic sectors. Examples of engagement with community might include:
- case-based learning
- core practical skills
- field and placement experiences

Graduate Attributes

The University of Melbourne's graduate attributes emphasize attaining a "set of flexible and transferable skills for different types of employment," being able "to be well informed citizens able to contribute to their communities wherever they choose to live and work, and to "initiate and implement constructive change in their communities, including professions and workplaces."

Melbourne graduate will be:
- academically excellent
- knowledgeable across disciplines
- leaders in communities
- attuned to cultural diversity
- active global citizens

Common generic skills related to these attributes include:
- problem solving skills
- critical thinking skills
- analytic skills
- teamwork skills
- effective oral and written communication skills
- time management skills

Integrating capstones into the curriculum

The design, type and scope of the capstone experience will depend on the individual curriculum development in discipline-specific and multi-discipline settings. It is important to be clear about the reasons for designing the capstone experience and how it relates to the overall course or undergraduate program.

Questions to consider when designing a capstone experience include:

- What are the aims of the capstone experience in terms of student learning outcomes?
- What type of capstone experience will be most effective learning approach in the subject/course?
- What will students learn and be able to reflect on in this capstone?
- What are the factors that will assist or hinder this capstone experience?
- How will this capstone be conducted and what resources do I need to make it effective?
- How will this capstone experience be assessed?
- How might the students respond to this capstone experience and how will their feedback be gathered for continuous improvement?