Spring 2022 Capstone Research Report

Executive Summary

As part of the ongoing assessment of the core curriculum, CCC conducted research on the PLU capstone requirement. We used focus group and survey methods with students, and held conversations with faculty in formal and informal contexts. Research revealed variation and inequity in how capstone is delivered. While both students and faculty overwhelmingly signal a desire for some form of culminating experience, expectations for how that experience should be delivered vary widely. Re-evaluating the capstone requirement should be part of our efforts to make general education more sustainable and more student-centered.

Faculty note the challenges of delivering the current capstone. They value the opportunity to work with students in a research and/or mentoring context, but they note the requirement can be very labor intensive. Due to constraints caused by staffing and/or program requirements, the capstone is sometimes taught (or supported) minimally in-load or entirely out of load. The recent FJC reductions compound the staffing problem in many programs. Additionally, faculty note that the expectations for students in capstone do not always align to program learning goals.

Most students (including alumni) like the capstone and value the experience. However, they note that some capstones seem to be designed as preparation for graduate school even though many students will not go to graduate school. Across campus, students are seeking more applied and/or professional opportunities (in and beyond capstone). In terms of capstone design, students like autonomy in topic and genre selection, but structure in course design. But they also want a clear connection between course tasks and either the project they're working on /or professional development. They too seek better connections between the capstone and program learning goals. They also want clear and consistent communication about the capstone throughout their major program.

Based on this research we recommend maintaining a culminating experience as part of general education as a means for signaling the integration of general and specific learning at PLU, and for ensuring every student has a significant learning experience at the end of their time at the university. However, because disciplinary priorities, department expertise, and staffing circumstances vary so greatly, the culminating experience must be largely controlled by the departments themselves. We recommend the "opening up" of the capstone to include a range of culminating experiences, including senior seminars, internships, portfolios, and so on. Additionally, we strongly recommend that students have an opportunity for reflection on the entirety of their PLU experience, including major, general education, co-curricular, and/or work experiences.

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Purpose & Context

As part of the ongoing assessment of the core curriculum, the Chair of CCC and the Director of the Core Curriculum (then interim) conducted research on the PLU capstone requirement. Our focus on the capstone was initiated in fall 2021 when several departments inquired about the possibility of changing or removing the capstone requirement, which currently resides in the general education program. Their motivation stemmed from difficulty reconciling the requirement with current staffing and curricular constraints.

Research in the fall revealed tremendous variation in how the capstone is delivered across campus. These variations come with equity concerns for faculty and students. For example, the capstone ranges in value from 1 credit to 8 credits. It lasts two full semesters in some programs, but only 8 weeks in others. Students complete projects that range from research papers to portfolios to comprehensive exams. All capstones involve some form of presentation, but the length and complexity of the presentation varies widely. Most students deliver their presentation individually, but some do so as part of a group. In many programs, faculty contributions to capstone are uncompensated (usually a faculty mentor model) or undercompensated (they earn less than the course credit value).

As we work to create a more sustainable core curriculum, the future of the capstone needs to be part of our evaluation. While it seems a majority of faculty and students like having some form of culminating project at the end of a degree program, several questions emerge from our research:

- PLU's economic constraints mean that we have limited options related to staffing. How can we assure a substantive, but also sustainable, culminating project or experience is present in all departments and programs?
- Given that capstone is a staffing and curricular burden in some programs and not others, should it be located in general education (where it must be universal) or should it be turned over to programs who may choose to maintain, modify, or eliminate this requirement? *Note: from the perspective of university assessment, some form of culminating experience should be present in every degree program.*
- Given shifting student demographics and a fast changing workforce, how can we ensure our capstone requirement meets student needs and expectations in all programs?
- If capstone remains in general education, how can we better align all capstone courses to reflect the purpose and value of general education?

Method

The chair of CCC and the Director of the Core Curriculum completed this research from January to May 2022. Multiple methods of data collection were employed to ensure feedback was gathered from a range of students in a range of disciplinary homes. A survey was distributed to all students enrolled in capstone during the fall 2021 semester. We received 46 responses; a 19.4% response rate (see Appendix A). Focus groups were conducted in spring capstones. We visited 12 capstone programs in total (3 HUMA, 3 NSCI, 3 SSCI, 2 PROF, and 1 IDIS; accounting for 134 total students). Focus groups lasted approximately one hour and were conducted using a standardized script (see Appendix B). Additionally, a survey was distributed to PLU alums from the last 10 years to collect information on the impact of capstone for next steps after graduation (see Appendix C).

Feedback was also collected from faculty through open forums with CCC (2 total), as well as individual meetings with chairs and conversations with chairs councils.

Results & Findings

Faculty Perspectives on the Capstone Requirement
Generally, faculty seem to agree some form of culminating project or experience is important at the end of every degree program. However, attitudes about the nature of this project or experience, the rigor and duration, and the purpose or value of the requirement vary quite a bit.

Differences in capstone delivery strategies across campus are *generally* contingent on faculty-to-student major ratio. Programs with small faculty-to-student ratios tend to report they are happy with the capstone requirement as is. In capstones that are typically kept small (and with one or two sections), faculty are able to provide hands-on mentoring and guidance for every student in the course. They are able to adapt the course design to meet the needs of all (or most) students in the course. Further, some of these programs have a large number of courses that count as both Gen Ed and major courses, meaning the capstone is one of a few (or sometimes the only) setting in which majors are working only alongside other majors.

Programs with a large number of majors usually also have larger student to faculty ratios. The capstones in these programs attempt to strike an uncomfortable balance between sound pedagogy, faculty workload concerns, and student expectations about their capstone experience. Students (and faculty) are often disappointed with the compromises that must be made to meet the capstone requirements within existing curricular and staffing constraints. One faculty member described capstone as an "unfunded mandate" that isn't serving its stated goals. These capstones often use course credit to "fit" the capstone into faculty load, meaning the courses may count for one, two, or four credits, depending on what the program can spare in terms of faculty time. Additionally, they may be more likely to rely on uncompensated or undercompensated labor by faculty, though this also happens in smaller programs that use a faculty mentor model.

Regardless of the size of the program, we have heard a desire for some uniformity in workload for both faculty and students. Some faculty feel that, if this can't be achieved, then departments should have more control over the design and purpose of the capstone requirement for their students.

Some faculty have expressed concern about removing the capstone from general education. This would, presumably, make it much easier to eliminate the capstone requirement in some departments. There is concern that such a change will:
1. Eliminate one of only a few shared learning experiences at PLU;
2. Increase the likelihood that students might select majors based on the presence or absence of a capstone requirement;
3. Remove one location where students are able to generate substantive research.

Problems with the Capstone as Designed
In addition to the central problem of inequitable staffing and student experience, the faculty have identified a range of other problems connected to the capstone requirement.

The quality of the capstone requirement has been impacted by the FJC reductions. Faculty reductions without concomitant changes in curriculum or and capstone expectations places additional burden on remaining faculty. In programs using a mentoring model--which has always been labor intensive and generally uncompensated--this problem is felt even more prominently. With the loss of faculty colleagues, we have a smaller pool of expertise to draw on in supporting student research interests. Finally, changes

in PLU co-curricular programs--the closure of CCES, the expanded responsibilities on the Wang Center, staff losses in Alumni and Student Connections--have made applied capstones more difficult to design and implement. Based on our student research, these options are highly coveted and deeply rewarding, but they are also labor intensive for faculty and staff.

In many programs, the capstone course expectations do not line up with program learning outcomes. More specifically, the capstone may introduce entirely new learning expectations that have not been a part of the program. The most common example of this is the presentation requirement. Presentation strategies are not taught extensively in core courses for many majors, yet it is often a centerpiece of the capstone course. Additionally, students are usually trained to compile secondary research in their core courses, but are then expected to do original research in capstone. Alternatively, they may be trained in primary research methods in their courses, but (often due to staffing challenges) the capstone may simply ask them to assemble sources. Fundamentally, many faculty and students have noted how programs do not always do a good job of explaining the role of the capstone in the design of the curriculum. Students need to understand how the curriculum builds to the culminating experience

Faculty note the lack of *general education* in the general education capstone requirement. Many noted that, if the requirement is going to "live" in general education it should reflect the goals and expectations of that program. Some suggested an additional Gen Ed capstone, but staffing such a course would be very difficult. Others called for general education components in existing capstone courses (e.g., common reflections, modules, etc.).

Finally, students with more than one major typically complete more than one capstone, often in the same semester. This can be stressful for students and difficult for faculty to manage. Some faculty wonder if there is a way to combine capstones so students have the option of completing only one (note: this already happens in some programs).

Capstone Alternatives and Options Offered by the Faculty
Most faculty we spoke with seem to agree there is value in having students take on a challenging project at the end of their degree. It gives them a chance to "see what they can do." For the most part, students agree. But it is also clear that not all students arrive prepared to meet this challenge and faculty often end up serving as project managers more so than teachers and mentors.

The faculty have offered a range of options--big and small--for rethinking the requirement (these are in no particular order):
- Make the capstone project optional and, perhaps, a qualification for honors standing in the department.
- Replace the capstone with senior seminars that do not require every student to complete individual research, but afford some opportunity for "digging into" a topic or subject.
- Shift the focus of capstone from research to vocational discernment and preparation (e.g., internship-based or focused on preparation for graduate school or career pathways).
- Ensure that students have multiple options for genres and products they might create in a capstone course, including traditional research projects, but also reflections, portfolios, community-based projects and programs, etc.
- Combine capstones across multiple, related programs to shore up staffing problems and to take advantage of interdisciplinary options.
- Make the capstone course pass/fail.

- Revise our approach to think of capstone not as an end point but as a starting point for a problem or question the student can carry forward to graduate school or into a career (or that simply interests them).
- Eliminate (or make optional) the public presentation component to alleviate student stress and reduce workload in the course.

Ultimately, a central question is whether or not capstone should remain a requirement of the general education program. If it remains in general education, then it needs to be reframed to ensure it can be delivered equitable. It also needs to have some integrated connection to general education learning goals.

Fall 2021 Capstone Student Survey

In terms of "purpose," the vast majority of students who took the survey stated the purpose of capstone is demonstration. It's an opportunity to "show off" what they've learned and a "culmination" of their experience at PLU and in the major. Our focus groups in spring overwhelmingly said the same thing. Several survey respondents described the capstone as a research practicum where they develop research skills, conduct research, and present data. Only three called it preparation for employment or other future steps. One called it "busy work."

A majority of students find the work challenging or very challenging, with the most common challenges being: 1) time management, 2) the genre or format expectations of the capstone project, 3) multiple, overlapping assignments and tasks in the capstone course, 4) communication with the professor (general and regarding expectations), and 5) expectations for working with peers/partners.

On a scale of 1 to 5, how challenging was the capstone project?
46 responses
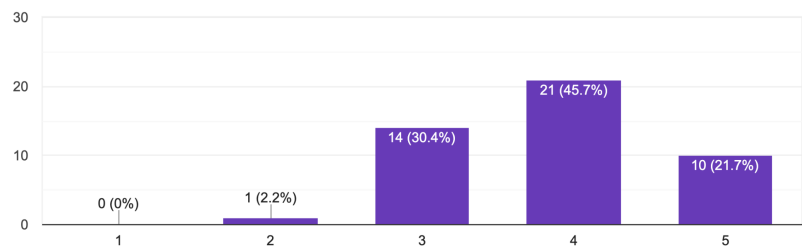
Many students also find the capstone requirement stressful. Specific stressors identified by students include: 1) deadlines and time management, 2) professor clarity and clarity of expectations, 3) presentation anxiety, 4) self-imposed standards for quality, 4) working with peers and partners, and 5) the scale and scope of the project (which generally differs from anything they've done in their regular coursework).

On a scale of 1 to 5, how stressful was the capstone project for you?
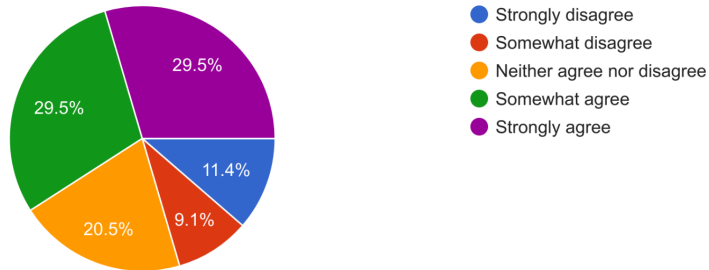46 responses
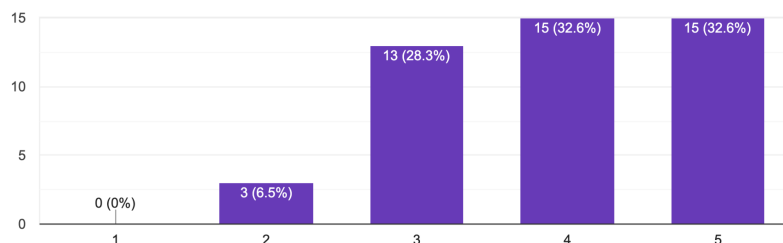
Roughly half the students surveyed said the stresses of capstone impacted their mental health. 37% also said the stresses of the capstone impacted their ability to do their best work on their capstone project.

A majority of students feel their capstone course and project prepared them for professional

goals they have after graduation (59%). 20.5% did not feel the capstone was preparing them for professional goals. The vast majority--75%--said they were satisfied with the work they had done in their capstone project.

To what extent do you feel that your capstone work prepared you for professional goals you have after graduation?
44 responses

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

We also polled students on their most and least liked aspects of the capstone course.

Most liked aspects:
- The final product
- The subject matter and depth of study
- Presenting and sharing their work
- Independence and autonomy
- Teamwork and collaboration

Most disliked aspects:
- Genre limitations and requirements
- Limited time and hard deadlines
- Personal indiscipline
- The presentation requirement

Spring 2022 Alumni Survey

Our alumni survey focused solely on the value of the capstone in relation to the present and future work plans of graduates from the last 10 years. We focused on this area because the questions were included with a regular update conducted by the office of Alumni and Student Connections. We recognize this is just one way to consider the value of the capstone course.

In our survey, 55% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed the capstone project helped them prepare for their current or future career, while an additional 22% responded neutrally to this question. This means 23% of graduates surveyed disagree or strongly disagree that the capstone prepared them for current or future work. Importantly, many graduates who disagreed or strongly disagreed emphasized how the capstone had other value, either in relation to skill development, confidence building, or community and camaraderie.

The most commonly cited skills developed in capstone were:
- Conducting (and to carefully reading) research
- Synthesis of data and research materials
- Effective communication with diverse audiences, particularly non-specialists
- Effective writing, particularly argumentative writing
- Effective presentation skills
- Project and time management
- Critical and analytical thinking
- Other, less common skills, including: interviewing, data analysis, self-direction, and collaboration.

Alumni comments, which were mostly positive, focused primarily on:
- The value of the capstone for preparing students for MA and PhD programs. Many graduates noted this.
- The value of the capstone as a culmination of one's academic career. For many, the capstone is a chance to show off knowledge and skills.
- The value of the capstone as a "concrete" project to use for job and graduate school applications. Several alums noted how the project opened doors after graduation.

Several alums also said that capstone was "highlight" of their time at PLU, even if it didn't directly apply to a career.

Those with negative comments typically remarked on the design of the capstone (the genre and/or lack of options), a lack of support (from faculty instructors or advisors), a lack of applied value (e.g., an internship would have been better), and/or a perceived repetition of training/skill development from other courses in the major.

Student Focus Groups
Among the most prominent lessons of the capstone focus groups was the importance of an effective capstone instructor. The most satisfied students were those in a capstone course where they understood the purpose and plan for the course. Generally, the characteristics of an effective instructor--as described by students--are:
- An ability to encourage and to put students at ease;
- An ability to manage student expectations and to clarify the purpose of the capstone project within the major;
- A willingness to be accessible to students (and usually to schedule accessibility into the class);
- A willingness to offer ongoing support and feedback to students (usually as part of the course plan) rather than leaving students to work largely on their own.

On this last point, autonomy is an important consideration. We saw a spectrum of autonomy in these courses from very high autonomy to very low autonomy. It seems like a balance of the two is most desirable for students. More specifically, most students seem to want more control over topic and genre selection, but less control over the structure of their time. That is, they want choice in topic and deliverable, but they also want regular touchpoints to help them avoid procrastination.

Similarly, capstone instructors need to consider how much scaffolding to include in their course design. Scaffolding here refers to those smaller, incremental assignments in a capstone course. Typically, these build to the final project, but not always. Again, we saw a spectrum of student response here. Some capstone courses are very scaffolded, requiring students to turn in work every week. This often feels overwhelming for students. However, we also saw capstones that had almost no project scaffolding. This "hands off" approach leaves students feeling under supported and often results in procrastination. Additionally, students report that scaffolded assignments that are not clearly connected to the capstone project often feel like "busy work." Students like to know that their work is "counting" for something or moving them toward a particular goal. Assignments that don't meet that expectation feel extraneous, tacked on.

Students in many research-focused capstone classes (or classes where a research paper is the dominant mode) expressed concern about the value of the research paper for their next steps after graduation. Those students planning for graduate school were able to make an immediate connection between the

research project and skills they'll need for the future. Students planning for something other than graduate school generally said they understood the value of the work and could explain how some of the intensive research and writing skills were transferable to other contexts. However, many said these were skills they felt they had mastered in upper division courses in their major and in general education. Increasing the word count or scope of research was challenging, but not a new set of tools. And standards for page count, minimum citations, etc. sometimes feel arbitrary when students are being asked to work like scholars in a discipline. They feel like the form the project takes should follow the function and purpose.

Students across campus articulated a desire for more "applied" options. Students are interested in professional development, career preparation, vocation discernment, and community-based research and practice. Problem-based capstones are increasingly popular.

Conversations with capstone students reveal there is sometimes a disconnect between the content of courses in the curriculum and expectations for capstone projects. This point is most prominent for the presentation requirement. Many programs do not teach students presentation skills as part of their normal curriculum but expect polished presentations when students complete the capstone. The same is true of disciplinary methods and practices. Students may have gotten an introduction or overview in upper division courses in the major, but very often students do not feel the training from the curriculum matches the expectations of the capstone requirement. Or, based on the courses they selected and the instructors teaching those courses, they may miss out on some methods and skills altogether. Programs should evaluate whether all students are arriving at the capstone with the skills they'll need to succeed there. If not, curriculum and/or course content should be revised.

Students identified some misalignment between course credit and workload expectations. They sometimes feel they are asked to spend more time on the course than is reflected in its credit value. This comment was most common in capstones that count for 1 or 2 credits, but there were students in 4-credit capstones that felt the course required more than 4-credits worth of labor. Importantly, students know what their peers are doing in other capstones so they have context for how much work should be required for 1, 2 and 4 credit capstone courses.

Related to this, faculty should be aware of other student commitments, including other courses (often rigorous upper division courses), jobs, co-curricular commitments (often leadership roles), and job searching and/or applying to graduate school.

In general, students desire better communication about capstone. They want to know the design and expectations for the final project when they begin the program so they can think about their course selection more carefully. Many students in many majors said they would have chosen other course options if they had a sense for what they'd need to know for their capstone. Additionally, many students said they would have liked to have begun developing their capstone project earlier than the one semester they got to complete the work.

Finally, students completing more than one major present a problem for our capstone requirement. Because capstone is a general education requirement, students must complete at least one capstone course. However, all majors also have a capstone requirement. As such, students completing more than one major--particularly when the capstones run concurrently--report particularly high levels of stress. In some cases, these students were able to combine their projects so they take two courses but complete one capstone project. Generally, this has been effective, but not all students had a good experience meeting the demands of two different faculty mentors in two different fields. Further, some students want to focus on the methods and subject matter of both disciplines. A merger dilutes the depth and quality of

what they can produce. Perhaps the ideal solution within our current requirement would be to ensure that students do not complete two capstone courses in one semester. However, faculty reductions have left many departments offering one capstone course per year, typically in the spring semester.

Recommendations
As part of the larger effort to make the core sustainable for the long term we must deal with the purpose and placement of the capstone requirement. Based on this research we recommend maintaining a culminating experience as part of general education. This will signal to students the importance of integrating general and specific learning at PLU. It will also ensure that every student has a significant learning experience at the end of their time at the university. However, because disciplinary priorities, department expertise, and staffing circumstances vary so greatly, the culminating experience must be largely controlled by the departments themselves. We recommend the "opening up" of the capstone to include a range of culminating experiences, including senior seminars, internships, portfolios, and so on. Additionally, we strongly recommend that students have an opportunity for reflection on the entirety of their PLU experience, including major, general education, co-curricular, and/or work experiences.

Additional recommendations based on this research include:

Programs should aim for a balance of autonomy and structure. Students need to pursue topics, problems, and questions that matter to them, but they also need guardrails that help to ensure 1) the scope of the project is reasonable, 2) that program learning goals are being met, and 3) the timeline for completion is clear and sensible. In some cases, faculty might want to shift their view of capstone operation from traditional teaching to project management. In the most successful capstones we saw, faculty adopted this approach. Students in the course did some common work, but the majority of course time was spent on guided research with regular check-in and review.

Course deliverables should match student expectations and ambitions. In programs where graduate school is a viable next step for students, it makes sense to use the capstone course to prepare them. Though, importantly, some students will still want other options. In programs where graduate school is not a desirable next step, it makes less sense to prepare students with skills for graduate level work. Though, importantly, some students will choose that option based on interest and passion, regardless of professional opportunities waiting for them.

Ensure consistency across capstone sections within programs. Here, consistency may mean multiple sections in a single semester or iterations of capstone over time, but students should have a generally similar experience in the program (i.e., they develop the same skills) and in the capstone.

Avoid circumstances where capstone is required of some, but not all students. While this may make sense logistically, it also creates a two-tiered system that may leave some students feeling undervalued. That said, the option to produce a traditional research paper may be one of many options. Other options might include posters, portfolios, community-based research or action projects, and so on. Further, rather than removing the requirement altogether, it may be more effective to incentivize high-performing students to work beyond reasonable minimum requirements (Hauhart and Grahe 2014).

Improve communication about the capstone. From the day they declare students should receive clear communication about the culminating project in the major. Any changes to the capstone course or requirement should be messaged clearly to students, including a rationale for the changes. And messaging should be consistent from every faculty member. Additionally, there is value in trying to

interrupt lore about the capstone as unreasonably difficult or as a "right of passage." The passage metaphor may not be inclusive of all student's post-graduate goals.

Ensure the parameters and expectations of the capstone project are clear to students (Hauhart and Grahe 2014), including:
- Clear course requirements;
- Transparent, sequential steps that scaffold toward project completion;
- Well-articulated standards for success at each step and in the final project;
- Supplemental activities that have value for the capstone project or student development;
- A carefully developed rationale explaining each assignment and its value to the program and course (try not to assume students are making connections on their own).

Build adequate feedback and engagement into the course design to save faculty time and enhance student experience. If necessary, reduce traditional "content" to ensure that both student-to-student peer review and faculty-to-student review and mentoring are built into the course. Most capstone courses do this effectively, but it should be a standard across the university.

Appendix A: Fall 2021 Capstone Survey Script
The PLU Core Curriculum Committee is conducting research on student's attitudes and feelings about the PLU capstone requirement. The following survey invites you to comment on your recent experience in a fall 2021 capstone course. Survey questions will focus on your experience in the course and the value of the capstone project for your professional goals.

The insights you provide will be generalized into a report and delivered to the Core Curriculum Committee. Additionally, data gathered from this conversation will be shared with faculty. However, your name and email address will not be collected with this survey and identifying information will be removed.

The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete.

The survey is facilitated by the Office of the Provost. Please contact Scott Rogers, Interim Director of the Core Curriculum, with any questions or concerns (rogerssm@plu.edu).

Survey Questions
- What year are you in? [Choices: PLUS year, senior, junior]
- For what degree program did you complete your fall 2021 capstone? [options + other blank]
- What kind of project did you complete for your culminating capstone project? [check all that apply; options + other blank]
- What do you understand to be the purpose of the capstone requirement? [short answer]
- How challenging was the capstone project to complete? [Likert]
- What aspects of the project were challenging for you? Challenges might include understanding course content, managing time commitments, or balancing multiple commitments (e.g., school, work, childcare, etc.). [short answer]
- How stressful was the capstone project for you? [Likert]
- Did the stress impact your mental health in any way? [Likert]
- Did the stress impact your ability to do your best work on the project? [Likert]
- If you wish to share, what about your capstone was stressful for you? [blank]
- To what extent do you agree that the capstone course built on skills and concepts that you had developed in other courses in the major? [Likert]
- To what extent do you feel that the capstone course required that you learn entirely new skills and concepts? [Likert]
- From your perspective, did your capstone work prepare you for professional goals you have after graduation? [Likert]
- Are you happy with the work you did for your capstone? [Likert]
- What do you most like about the work you did for your capstone? [blank]
- What do you least like about the work you did for your capstone? [blank]
- If you could change anything about your capstone course or assignment what would it be? [blank]
- What else would you like us to know about your capstone experience?

Appendix B: Senior Capstone Focus Group Script

Introduction
The Core Curriculum Committee is responsible for maintaining the quality and consistency of the general education program at PLU. Based on requests from faculty and students, the committee is exploring a potential change to the general education program that would remove the senior capstone as a gen ed requirement. As a result of this change, departments and programs would be able to determine the form

that any capstone or culminating requirement would take. We are gathering information from current and former students on the value of the capstone experience to help inform our decision-making.

Because you are currently enrolled in a capstone course, you are in a unique position to provide valuable feedback on the capstone requirement. We are hosting 12 focus groups in capstone courses from across the university (all schools and divisions are represented). These focus groups will be led by members of the Core Curriculum Committee. Your capstone instructor will not be present.

During this conversation, you will be asked several questions focused in two key areas: 1) your experience in the capstone course, and 2) your sense for how the capstone is serving your academic, social, and/or professional goals.

The insights you provide in the focus group session will be generalized into a report and delivered to the Core Curriculum Committee. Additionally, data gathered from this conversation will be generalized and shared with your capstone instructor and department. However, your names will not be recorded and defining characteristics will be removed from the transcript to aid confidentiality. We ask that what is discussed with your capstone group not be shared.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact Dr. Scott Rogers (rogerssm@plu.edu), interim Director of the Core Curriculum, or Dr. Lauri McCloud (mcclouls@plu.edu), Chair of the Core Curriculum Committee.

I will record the conversation for the purpose of transcription only. The recording will not be heard by other faculty members and your name will not be recorded with the transcript. The original recording will be destroyed after transcription.

Any questions about the purpose or process related to this focus group?

Questions about the Course/Requirement
Tell me about the nature of your capstone course. What is the subject? What kinds of assignments are you doing? What is the "deliverable" for your capstone course?

What do you understand to be the purpose of the capstone requirement?

Questions about your experience in the Course
How much time are you spending on the capstone project or how much time do you anticipate spending? Do you feel like this is a reasonable or unreasonable amount of time? Explain why you think the way you do.

How challenging has the project been to complete or how challenging do you expect it to be? What aspects of the project are challenging? Challenges might include understanding course content, managing time commitments, or balancing multiple commitments (e.g., school, work, childcare, etc.). [blank]

Did you find the capstone course stressful? If you answered no, tell me a little bit about why you felt like it was not stressful. If you answered yes, try to explain why it was stressful.

What challenges are you facing in completing the capstone? (examples: other courses, jobs, complexity of the material)

Value of the capstone for academic/professional goals
Do you have specific professional goals for after graduation? Do you feel like the capstone course is preparing you for specific things you'll need to be able to do in this career? Do you think the capstone course is providing you with skills or ideas that you might use in other non-professional contexts?

What else would you like to share about your experience in this capstone course?

Appendix C: 2022 Alumni Survey Script

The Core Curriculum Committee at PLU is exploring a potential change to the general education program that would move the senior capstone requirement out of the general education program. As a result of this change, departments and programs would be able to determine the form that a capstone or culminating requirement would take.

Because one potential outcome might be that some programs eliminate their capstone requirement entirely, we are gathering information from current and former students on the value of the capstone experience. From alumni, specifically, we are interested in how the capstone prepared (or did not prepare) you for the work you are doing now.

Your answers to the following survey questions will offer valuable insight into the impact of the capstone on PLU post-graduate preparation. This brief survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete.

Your email address will be collected with this survey. However, your name will be removed by the Office of Alumni and Student Connections prior to sharing your response with the committee. There will be no way to connect your response to your identity unless you reference identifying details about your project topic, graduation year, etc.

If you have questions or wish to discuss this subject further, please contact Dr. Lauri McCloud, Chair of the Core Curriculum Committee at mclouls@plu.edu.

Question #1:
For which program(s) did you complete a capstone? If you completed more than one capstone, please feel free to list more than one program. [Check all that apply]

Question #2:
What format did your capstone project(s) take (e.g., a research paper, presentation, internship, proposal, poster, etc.)? [Check all that apply]

Question #3:
Where do you work now and what do you do there? (include a title and/or description) [Short Answer]

Question #4:

To what extent do you agree with the statement: my capstone course/project prepared me for the work I am doing in my job now? [Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree]

Please describe any particular skills, concepts, or ideas that you learned in your capstone course that are valuable for the work you are doing now. [Short Answer]

Question #5:
To what extent do you agree with the statement: my capstone course/project prepared me for the work I expect to do later in my career? [Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree]

Please describe any particular skills, concepts, or ideas that you learned in your capstone that you feel will be valuable for the work you anticipate doing later in your career. [Short Answer]

Question #6:
What else would you like us to know about your capstone experience?

Thank you for completing this survey!

Appendix C: Alumni Capstone Survey

The Core Curriculum Committee at PLU is exploring a potential change to the general education program that would move the senior capstone requirement out of the general education program. As a result of this change, departments and programs would be able to determine the form that a capstone or culminating requirement would take.

Because one potential outcome might be that some programs eliminate their capstone requirement entirely, we are gathering information from current and former students on the value of the capstone experience. From alumni, specifically, we are interested in how the capstone prepared (or did not prepare) you for the work you are doing now.

Your answers to the following survey questions will offer valuable insight into the impact of the capstone on PLU post-graduate preparation. This brief survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete.

Your email address will be collected with this survey. However, your name will be removed by the Office of Alumni and Student Connections prior to sharing your response with the committee. There will be no way to connect your response to your identity unless you reference identifying details about your project topic, graduation year, etc.

If you have questions or wish to discuss this subject further, please contact Dr. Lauri McCloud, Chair of the Core Curriculum Committee at mclouls@plu.edu.

Question #1:
For which program(s) did you complete a capstone? If you completed more than one capstone, please feel free to list more than one program. [Check all that apply]

Question #2:
What format did your capstone project(s) take (e.g., a research paper, presentation, internship, proposal, poster, etc.)? [Check all that apply]

- Research Paper
- Presentation
- Reflection
- Self-Evaluation
- Poster

- Proposal
- Literature Review
- Art Exhibition/Portfolio
- Writing Portfolio

- Lab Report
- Other

Question #3:
Where do you work now and what do you do there? (include a title and/or description) [Short Answer]

Question #4:
To what extent do you agree with the statement: my capstone course/project prepared me for the work I am doing in my job now? [Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree]

Please describe any particular skills, concepts, or ideas that you learned in your capstone course that are valuable for the work you are doing now. [Short Answer]

Question #5:
To what extent do you agree with the statement: my capstone course/project prepared me for the work I expect to do later in my career? [Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree]

Please describe any particular skills, concepts, or ideas that you learned in your capstone that you feel will be valuable for the work you anticipate doing later in your career. [Short Answer]

Question #6:
What else would you like us to know about your capstone experience?

Thank you for completing this survey.