February 26, 2014

GRADUATE COUNCIL CHAIRS

Re: CCGA Guidance on Capstones

Dear Graduate Council Chairs:

CCGA suggests that both those proposing new Master’s degrees, as well as the campus reviewers of new proposals, pay special attention to the requirement that all such degrees have a capstone element.

In many programs, the capstone is satisfied by the requirement of a Master’s thesis or the requirement of a comprehensive examination. Where these mechanisms are not present, there is a capstone project of some kind (projects are common, for instance, in degrees for practicing professionals). CCGA pays very careful attention to the description of capstone projects in reviewing proposed new degrees, and proposers will experience a smoother review if they give a thorough and cogent treatment of this topic in their proposal.

In particular, CCGA will look for evidence of the following elements in the capstone projects envisioned by proposed new degrees:

(1) Capstone projects should be synthetic, tying together two or more areas of specific content that would typically be the subject of a class or a sequence of classes.

(2) Capstone projects can be individual or group-based exercises. If a project is group-based, the individual student’s achievements and contributions should be assessed through robust means. This could be detailed, for example, through the generation of an individual report by the student, periodic performance evaluations at various points in the project, individual assignments, and/or comprehensive specification of the individual team member’s role that can be tied to specific outcomes in a group report.

(3) The report should be evaluated by at least two reviewers; and at least one of them should have no direct vested interest in the success of the student (e.g., the student is not the reviewer’s GSR or collaborator).

(4) To ensure the consistent quality and scope of capstone projects, there should be a single coordinator or adviser who judges the appropriateness of planned projects and their timelines, following guidelines established by the program faculty.

CCGA recommends that program faculty and campus reviewers keep these same features in mind when a previously-approved Master’s program is being reformulated to incorporate a capstone or group capstone project in place of a comprehensive examination.

If you have any questions, please let me know.
Sincerely,

Donald Mastronarde, Ph.D.
Chair, CCGA

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