

**Using Emerging Evidence and Recommendations
to Support Senior-Year Students' Experience
ACPA 2013 – Las Vegas, Nevada**

Dallin George Young, Ph.D., Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment
Jennifer R. Keup, Ph.D., Director
National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

Introduction/Background

For institutions of higher education and the professionals that work in them, the senior year represents the final opportunity to serve seniors to prepare them to face the demands that lie ahead (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1998; Cuseo, 1998; Gardner, Van der Veer, & Associates, 1998). The senior-year experience movement represents a collection of intentional curricular and co-curricular efforts to support students in the senior year through this important transition (Gardner, et al., 1998). The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has underscored the importance of intentional initiatives situated in the senior year by identifying capstone experiences as an educational practice that has a high impact on a variety of outcomes. Research on these outcomes reports gains in areas such as student satisfaction, self-rated gains (Brownell & Swaner, 2010), active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction (Kuh, 2008), critical thinking skills, understanding of global problems, and acquisition of work-related skills (NSSE, 2009).

While the senior capstone experience represents only one institutional effort to support the senior year transition, the increase in the percentage of institutions that offer a senior capstone during the past decade suggests greater institutional attention to and investment in students in the senior year. More specifically, in 1999, 77.6% of institutions reported offering some senior capstone experience (Henscheid, 2000), while in 2011 the percentage of institutions rose to 97.1% (Padgett & Kilgo, 2012).

Length of time Senior Capstone Experiences have been on respondents' campuses

1999 National Survey of Senior Seminars/Capstone Courses (n=703)

| Item | Survey Question | Options | Frequency | Percent |
|------|--|--------------------|-----------|---------|
| Q23 | How many years has the senior seminar/capstone course been in existence at your institution? | < 1 | 6 | 0.9 |
| | | 1-5 | 232 | 33.0 |
| | | 6-10 | 174 | 24.8 |
| | | More than 10 years | 291 | 41.4 |

2011 National Survey of Senior Capstone Experiences (n=250)

| Item | Survey Question | Options | Frequency | Percent |
|------|---|--------------------|-----------|---------|
| Q8 | Approximately how many years has a senior capstone experience(s) been offered on your campus? | 1 year or less | 2 | 0.8 |
| | | 2 years | 1 | 0.4 |
| | | 3 - 10 years | 84 | 33.6 |
| | | More than 10 years | 163 | 65.2 |

Selected Findings from the 2011 National Survey of Senior Capstone Experiences

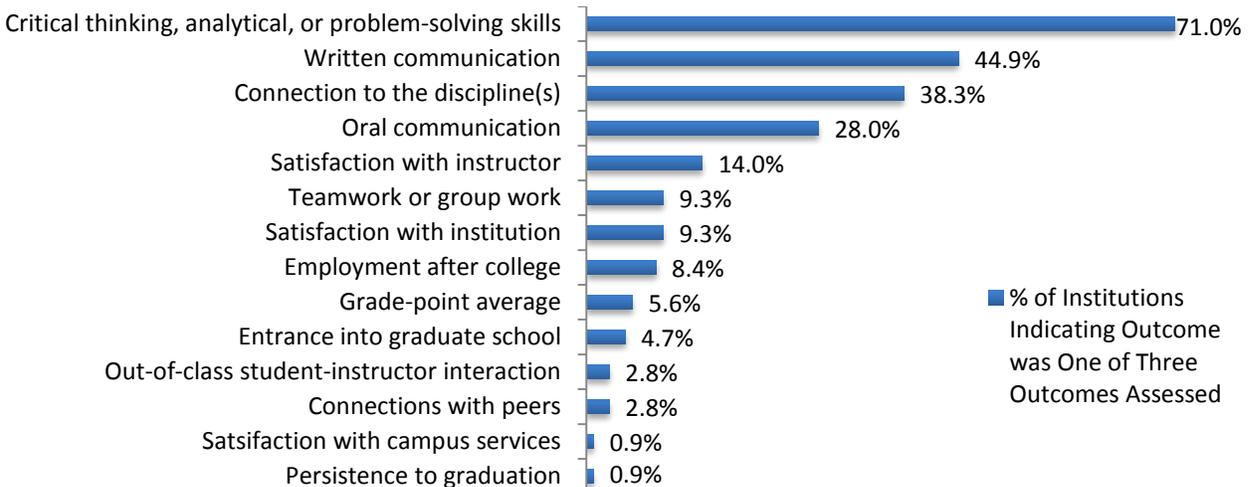
Comparison of Commonly Reported Course/Capstone Objectives and Topics

Five most frequently reported objectives and topics in senior capstone

| Objective | Percent | Topic ^a | Percent |
|--|---------|---|---------|
| Increase critical thinking, analytical skills, and/or problem solving skills | 49.6 | Critical thinking, analytical skills, and/or problem solving skills | 51.9 |
| Ability to conduct scholarly research | 27.6 | Discipline-specific topic | 43.3 |
| Career preparation | 25.0 | Conducting scholarly research | 26.5 |
| Professional development | 23.5 | Writing skills | 20.9 |
| Proficiency in written communication | 22.8 | Teamwork/group work | 16.8 |

^a Career development was ranked sixth most important topic (16.4%)

Assessment of Student Outcomes in Senior Capstone Experiences



Good Practices in Senior Capstone Experiences

