

**Using Emerging Evidence and Recommendations
to Support Senior-Year Students' Experience
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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

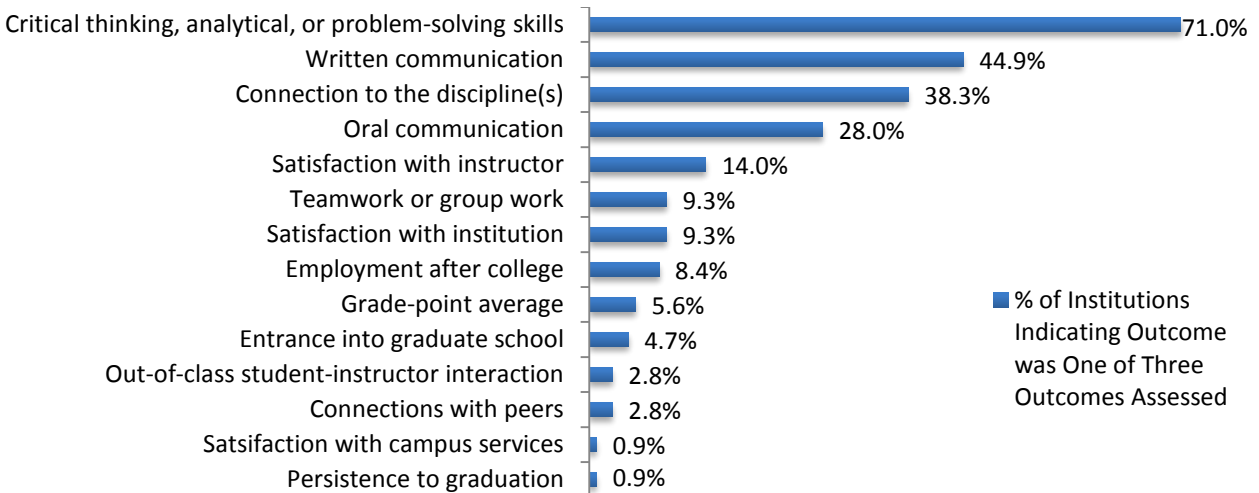
Comparison of Commonly Reported Course/Capstone Objectives and Topics

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

