

Capstones across disciplines RESOURCES

Typology: Professional contexts

This typology focuses on mechanisms to embed professional contexts in the curriculum. The variations outlined form a continuum from basic simulations to each student working with a partner or client that they have sourced. Some of the pros and cons of these approaches are provided. While not exhaustive, it can be used as a tool to support decision-making in curriculum design relative to curriculum control, goals and available resources.

	Description	Pros	Cons
Simulations	A capstone experience that is based on an external model but is wholly designed and controlled, with no explicit external stakeholders/ partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic requirements and professional experiences can be balanced Able to deliver consistent, well-structured curriculum because context is stable Equitable in terms of processes and learning outcomes No partners to manage Maintains some features of the 'real world' experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be limited in terms of real world experience, depending on staff knowledge of professional contexts Possibly limited in scope for students to individualise according to career directions Relevance, currency and student experience opportunities have to be carefully monitored and renewed Student perceptions of authenticity need to be managed
External frameworks	Completely class based but designed around an external framework leading to competition or similar. Students may never engage with an external stakeholder directly, but it is explicit that the brief is external to the course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic requirements and professional experiences can be balanced Able to deliver consistent curriculum where context is stable Equitable in terms of processes and learning outcomes No partners to manage Competitions are structured, and can be highly motivating and engaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited number of competitions that are appropriate Possibly limited in scope for students to individualise according to career directions May not be stable – criteria can change too late for curriculum response Timing relative to delivery must be considered May not be flexible in content and can become disconnected from desired learning experience/outcomes

	Description	Pros	Cons
Single ongoing partnership	Ongoing partnership with one external partner or client, ie the same client continues over a period of years and the projects/activities are fairly standard or continuous. Students may not even engage with the external partner to any great degree (may just present outcomes).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic requirements and professional experiences can be balanced One curriculum to deliver to all students Able to deliver consistent curriculum over time because context is stable Just one external stakeholder to find and manage Partner unlikely to completely pull out mid-stream Partner and peer evaluation/learning can alleviate supervision load 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finding a partner to provide a project that can run over time can be difficult Limited in scope for students to individualise according to future career directions Quality needs careful design, managing and renewal to maintain 'real-world' feel Single partner can become less engaged with process and provide less input as time goes on Projects can become stale over time so renewals are needed
Multiple ongoing partnerships	Ongoing partnerships with multiple external partners, i.e. the same partners continue over a period of years and the activities are fairly standard or continuous, such as working with a local community group, or running a newspaper. Students work in small groups or individually, each with a different brief.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic requirements and professional experiences may be balanced over time Learning needs/curriculum design can be reasonably stable over time with good relationships Ongoing relationships reduce need for managing expectations in each delivery Partners unlikely to pull out mid-stream Partner and peer evaluation/learning can alleviate supervision load 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finding/maintaining a number of ongoing partners is time intensive and risky, alternative projects may be needed Partners can require individual and ongoing management, as can balancing client requirements with academic If partners/projects are similar, somewhat limited in scope for students to individualise according to future career directions Projects can become stale over time so renewals are needed Multiple potential external assessors can take different approaches

	Description	Pros	Cons
Multiple one-off partnerships	Each student or small group has a separate client or partner. The partners/activities change every year and may be brought in by students or staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extremely flexible, real-world, individualised and exciting learning experiences Students can pursue activities highly relative to future career directions and develop important personal contacts Industry currency and networking for staff can be enhanced Partner and peer evaluation/learning can alleviate supervision load 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May require high levels of individualised curriculum at each delivery Finding partners and projects is highly time intensive for both staff and students Partners can require individual and ongoing management, as can balancing client requirements with academic Back up plan needed for fall-through projects Multiple potential external assessors can take different approaches

Useful references

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- McNamara, J., Kift, S. M., Butler, D., Field, R. M., Brown, C., & Gamble, N. (2012). Work-integrated learning as a component of the capstone experience in undergraduate law. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 13(1), 1-12.
- Patrick, C. J., Peach, D., Pocknee, C., Webb, F., Fletcher, M., & Pretto, G. (2008). *The WIL (Work Integrated Learning) report: a national scoping study [Final Report]*. Queensland University of Technology.
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