Capstone Part 2: What is a Capstone, Exactly?

If you’re like me, the word “capstone” could easily be synonymous with “enigma.” What is this thing that everyone talks about? What does it look like? What is it about? Of course, it’s all very well to talk about a “comprehensive, research-intensive thesis or project of original scholarship,” but what does that mean? What kind of things should I be thinking about when I get started, who should I be talking to, what kind of things should I write about?

In an effort to begin to demystify the Capstone Experience, my friend Kerry and I went to the CHC office in 504 Goodell and asked if we could, you know, actually see a Capstone or two. Chris Cuff, who works as the records clerk at the honors college, was extremely helpful. We told him our majors (between us we have English (both), Spanish (me), and History (Kerry)), and he helped us find examples of Capstones in each major that we could peruse. It was very helpful and very interesting to be able to flip through the actual pages of three people’s actual theses. We saw how they were formatted, what their broad topics were, how they focused in on specific details. For me at least, it helped me to have a more realistic idea of exactly what I’m going to try to accomplish. It also helped me to articulate more clearly what I don’t want to do. The Capstones that we looked at, although they were in three different disciplines, all relied heavily on historical research, which was great for Kerry, but not so much for me. While Kerry is going to synthesize her two interests in literature and history, I would like to focus more narrowly on literary criticism. Even though I didn’t see something exactly like what I am interested in, I’m glad we went and looked.

If you are feeling confused and terrified like I was (well, still am, a little, but not as much!) I definitely recommend looking at some actual Capstones. You can also find them (many more, I suspect, although I haven’t been there yet) in the University Archives on the twenty-fifth floor of the W.E.B. Du Bois Library (remember when Renée talked about Special
Collections? That’s there too!). In fact, I think I will have to head there next.

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