



## SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION Capstone Event Overview

### Objectives

Students who complete the Social Studies Education Capstone Event satisfactorily will have demonstrated the capacity to:

- Analyze and describe trends and persistent issues in curriculum and instruction, generally, and the Social Studies field, specifically;
- Take a position on trends or issues supported with sound reasoning and evidence;
- Act as a critical thinker, reader, writer, and practitioner of relevant research;
- Select and organize substantive historical and social science knowledge in ways that are conducive to powerful and authentic social studies teaching and learning;
- Incorporate multiple perspectives in teaching, curriculum, and research to represent differing experiences and interpretations. In other words, demonstrate how history and social theory encompass differing perspectives, interpretations, change over time, and the implications for you as a professional educator and for the field of social studies.

### Narrative Overview

An official overview of Capstones can be found at the [Graduate School of Education Policies and Procedures for EdM Programs](#). This is a University at Buffalo requirement for all Master's level programs, which are then differentiated at the program level. The Social Studies Capstone Event is the culmination of your Ed.M., Social Studies Education Program, or Education Studies Program. As a summative assessment developed cumulatively from learning across your program, you will draw on coursework, teaching, and any practicums or experiences completed during the program.

Beginning fall 2021, there are three capstone options: an e-portfolio, a project, and a thesis. You will need to register for 1-6 credits for LAI 700 with your advisor. You will register for at least 3 credits of LAI 701 with your advisor for the Thesis.

Decide what format is best for your learning goal. Approach your choice like teaching. You have topics, themes, and concepts that you need to convey to students. Some are just better taught as debates or through discussion, while others merit a role-play combined with extension writing assignments. In the case of the final project, you are the teacher and the learner. The Social Studies Education Program faculty hope you have learned to combine these roles and continue to combine them throughout your career.

To determine what is the most suitable capstone for you, consider what you are interested in exploring more but have not had the chance to explore via coursework and/or student teaching, and/or other relevant experiences. What did you begin to learn about during your master's program but have not had the time further explore (e.g., think about, read about,

practice; write about)? Also, early in your program and often, talk to alumni (e.g., your instructors) and faculty to find out what has been completed and to brainstorm or bounce off ideas. Meet with your academic advisor and your faculty advisor (potentially together), to map out your capstone credit hours onto your personalized Ed.M. program plan.

After you decide what format you would like to adopt, follow the guidelines and “DO” list below to get started *and* to complete your work on time, successfully. Then meet with your advisor to discuss your ideas the semester before you intend to complete the capstone. At that meeting be prepared to discuss what you are interested in doing and what format you are most interested in completing (What issue will you explore? What question do you hope to answer? How will you explore it? How, if at all, might I build my project from the teacher-researcher cycle?). By brainstorming and planning prior to the semester you will complete the capstone, you start off with a rough template to work from and finish your program strong, enjoying the journey, and preparing your best work possible such that you would use it long after you have graduated.

### **YOUR Capstone Event “DO” list:**

- Do look ahead, or better yet: backward plan to complete the capstone. When will you complete the capstone? Which format? Why? What assessment criteria or rubrics will be applied to your event?
- Do meet with your advisor regularly and minimally the semester prior to when you will complete the capstone.
- Do treat this project as the culmination of one stage of your professional preparation that has purpose beyond earning credits. (How might this project be valuable to you in your teaching practice and / or to others who are eager to grow as educators and / or to prospective employers?)
- Do register for 3 credits with your advisor (with advanced approval) either for LAI 700 or LAI 701 the semester you plan to complete the capstone, normally the final semester of your Ed.M. program. There are exceptions so discuss your plans with your advisor.
- Do read [GSE Policies and Procedures](#) for overview of Master’s program expectations.
- Do review other capstone materials for further format descriptions and examples.
- Do plan on seeking feedback, bouncing ideas off of fellow students, former cooperating teachers, current colleagues, and professors.
- Do meet with your advisor to discuss your plans the semester before you plan to register for the capstone credits and again no later than week 2 of the semester in which you are registered for the capstone event.
- Do send your advisor a draft proposal by no later than week 3 of the semester.

- Do give your advisor one week to review the drafted proposal you sent Week 3 before scheduling a meeting to discuss feedback.
- Do plan to finish within the semester you register for credits. This is not a continuing education project unless previously planned as such.
- Do think about how you could share your project with others: professional development seminars, group planning meeting, Graduate School of Education Student Symposium every Spring semester, Social Studies and education conferences, digitally via a blog, Web site, etc.
- Do seek out and expect feedback and revisions.
- Do give yourself a pat on the back! You are one step closer to earning your Master's degree!
- Do contact your academic advisors about graduation requirements and deadlines.

## Capstone Event Formats and Guidelines

### Master's Portfolio

“A student who completes the master's portfolio is required to compile a set of materials that summarizes and displays the student's knowledge, skills, and problem-solving capabilities within their discipline as well as his/her ability to design, manage, operate, and report on topics typically required for professional employment. While the project option requires the student to research one specific topic, the portfolio option emphasizes the student's competence across several areas within his/her discipline. The materials in the portfolio must be assembled and presented in a professional manner. All elements of the portfolio must be organized cohesively and be self-explanatory.

The portfolio cannot be solely comprised of a student's previous work/coursework (e.g., course projects/papers). While such materials could comprise elements of the portfolio, the portfolio must also contain new and additional substantive work that would satisfy the expectations of another capstone option (e.g., thesis, project).” (*From The Graduate School Policy Library.*) [The rubric is here.](#)

**Step I. Prepare a Proposal.\* Submit the proposal to your faculty advisor no later than week 4 of the semester in which you are registered to complete the capstone. Include:**

- Explanation of the issue, topic, theme, or concept that will pull together all portfolio pieces
- Description of no more than four portfolio pieces to be included
- A rationale for issue, topic, theme, concept related to pieces selected
- Questions to be answered

- Discussion of what might be learned as a result of the portfolio
- How the project contributes to your professional development / meets LAI 700 objectives
- Detailed timeline of plans to complete portfolio
- All materials formatted according to most current APA edition

*The faculty advisor will take one week to review the proposal and either the student schedules to meet during office hours to discuss the proposal or via UB email the student will receive feedback and guidance on how to proceed. If the faculty advisor approves the proposal, then student will:*

### **Step II. Conduct a Literature Review\***

- Conduct literature review from multiple sources including research and practitioner peer reviewed journals, Internet, textbooks, etc.
- Note key scholars' research in issue, topic, theme, or concept
- Select literature and frame the literature review in relation to your final papers and to any additional materials you construct for inclusion in the portfolio (charts, curriculum, digital media, etc.)
- Draft an argument or a thesis statement for your portfolio, seek feedback on it from peers and professors
- Restate questions to be answered as a result of the review of the literature on your topic

### **Step III. Draft the Portfolio Content\***

- Draft an introductory essay that contains your argument or thesis statement; a brief introduction to the issue, topic, theme, or concept; an explanation of how the portfolio fulfills the capstone objectives
- Revise and refine course papers or projects (*you must turn in original papers or projects*). Your revisions will include the additional reading (e.g., literature review), experience where applicable, and take into consideration advisor's comments and suggestions
- Draft additional materials to be included in the portfolio (e.g., charts, curriculum, digital materials, etc.)
- Draft a culminating essay that re-states your argument or thesis; then, support it by including a more in-depth description with definition of the issue, topic, or area of interest based on your literature review; a discussion of course papers or projects, in relation to the issue, topic, theme, or concept and how they support your argument or thesis. In other words, this essay provides an opportunity to reflect on and synthesize the key issues, experiences, and products of one's Master program. More than a chronicle of coursework, this essay should offer a well-constructed argument that focuses on theoretical and pedagogical connections to social studies
- Draft an abstract, or short summary of no more than 150 words to accompany your portfolio. This will be submitted to The Graduate School. It is a Graduate School requirement to be included on the M-form (see The Graduate School Handbook).
- Format all portfolio pieces according to the most current APA edition style guidelines

### **Step IV. Final Written Paper and Materials\***

- Submit final draft of portfolio at least two weeks before the last week of classes

- Submit revised portfolio finals week

## Master's Project

“The focus of the research for a master's project is generally more applied than that for a thesis, with the student often defining a problem and developing a solution for it. The project may be a scholarly undertaking that results in a tangible outcome - a photo exhibit, a performance piece, a business plan, a technical report, a computer program, - that does not fit neatly within the framework of a traditional scholarly thesis paper. However, the final project should be accompanied by a paper written by the student that introduces, analyzes, and contextualizes the project, and demonstrates the student's familiarity with the relevant literature of the field. A master's project/paper receives final approval at the department level.” ([From the Graduate School Policy Library.](#)) [The rubric is here.](#)

## Differences between a Master's Project and a Master's Thesis

“Differences between a thesis and a project are generally related to the extent and focus of the research, the formatting of the finished written product, the requirement to give an oral defense of the work, and the final approval of the finished product.

A thesis is typically longer than a project and is a well-organized, thoroughly documented scholarly paper, detailing research purpose, methods, results, analyses, and conclusions. Research for a thesis maybe more extensive than research for a project in terms of the amount required, but this varies with the individual and the discipline. While a thesis must be defended orally in a public forum, a project need not be so defended unless the department requires such a defense. Whereas a master's project only needs approval at the department level, a master's thesis must receive final approval from the Graduate School, and will be kept in perpetuity in the University's thesis/dissertation database within the Library.” [From The Graduate School Policy Library.](#)

### Step I. Write a Project Proposal, which includes\*:

- A rationale for topic or area of interest
- Issues to be studied in topic or area of interest
- Questions to be answered
- Detailed outline and timeline
- How the project contributes to your professional development / meets LAI 700 objectives
- All materials formatted according to most current APA edition

*The faculty advisor will take one week to review the proposal. The student will schedule to meet during faculty advisor's office hours to discuss the proposal or will receive feedback via UB email. If the faculty advisor approves the proposal, then student will:*

### Step II. Write a Preliminary Literature Review, which includes\*:

- Research studies previously conducted on topic or area of interest

- Evidence of a search process. Where and how (e.g., keywords, librarian support) did you search for your sources? What parameters did you set around your searches?
- Multiple sources including research and practitioner (as applicable) peer-reviewed journals in relevant fields
- Themes identified in literature, as well as any gaps, need for further questioning of topic, or new directions needed to learn more about topic
- Draft and redraft an argument or a thesis statement. Be sure to seek feedback on it from peers, professors, a writing center
- Restate questions to be answered in light of the literature review

### **Step III. Theoretical and Methodological Framework, which includes:**

- Discussion of theories that have been applied to the topic in the past and one (or two) that seem plausible to apply to your study (NOTE: this / these may change as you continue to collect data and read literature)
- Discussion of methodologies and methods that have been applied to understand the topic. Describe which ones (methodological approach + methods for collecting data/what data means to you) make sense for your study (NOTE: this / these may change as you continue to collect data and read literature)
- Collect data and organize in a safe/secure location such as UBBox. Data may be collected in a classroom, library research, from interviews, from textbooks or Web sites. The data depends on the questions and the topic
- Code and analyze data as applicable to the project

### **Step IV. Final Written Paper, which is produced from a process that includes:\***

- Submitting an initial outline of the paper and a timeline for multiple revisions
- Submitting a first draft of the paper formatted to conform to the American Psychological Association's (APA) most updated version
- Submit final draft of the project at least two weeks before the last week of classes
- Submit revised project during finals week

## **Master's Thesis**

There are detailed and extensive guidelines for completing a Master's Thesis available in the [UB Graduate School's Policy Library](#). Review them all: from Master's Thesis Requirements to Copywriting options. The thesis option is different in many ways from the project format. The two most significant are: the formation of a committee of at least two faculty members to guide the thesis development and a public defense. The decision to complete a thesis should be taken in consultation with the faculty advisor as soon as possible in the program. A student may need more than one semester to complete the thesis including summer research and writing.

One rationale for deciding to pursue the thesis option is that the student is interested in pursuing a doctoral degree. The Master's thesis can be published, presented at conferences, and serve as an important document to include in the doctoral admission application.

## **Differences between a Master's Thesis and a Master's Project**

“Differences between a thesis and a project are generally related to the extent and focus of the research, the formatting of the finished written product, the requirement to give an oral defense of the work, and the final approval of the finished product.

A thesis is typically longer than a project and is a well-organized, thoroughly documented scholarly paper, detailing research purpose, methods, results, analyses, and conclusions. Research for a thesis maybe more extensive than research for a project in terms of the amount required, but this varies with the individual and the discipline. While a thesis must be defended orally in a public forum, a project need not be so defended unless the department requires such a defense. Whereas a master's project only needs approval at the department level, a master's thesis must receive final approval from the Graduate School, and will be kept in perpetuity in the University's thesis/dissertation database within the Library.” [From The Graduate School Policy Library.](#)

### **Step I. Write a Project Proposal, which includes\*:**

- A rationale for topic or area of interest
- Issues to be studied in topic or area of interest
- Questions to be answered
- Detailed outline and timeline
- How the project contributes to your professional development / meets LAI 700 objectives
- All materials formatted according to most current APA edition

*The faculty advisor will take one week to review the proposal. The student will schedule to meet during faculty advisor's office hours to discuss the proposal or will receive feedback via UB email. If the faculty advisor approves the proposal, then student will send it to the second faculty member to review and approve. Once and only if both faculty agree to the proposed project, the student will move forward in the process:*

### **Step II. Write a Preliminary Literature Review, which includes:\***

- Research studies previously conducted on topic or area of interest
- Evidence of a search process. Where and how (e.g., keywords, librarian support) did you search for your sources? What parameters did you set around your searches?
- Multiple sources including research and practitioner (as applicable) peer-reviewed journals in relevant fields
- Themes identified in literature, as well as any gaps, need for further questioning of topic, or new directions needed to learn more about topic
- Draft and redraft an argument or a thesis statement. Be sure to seek feedback on it from peers, professors, a writing center
- Restate questions to be answered in light of the literature review

### **Step III. Theoretical and Methodological Framework, which includes:**

- Discussion of theories that have been applied to the topic in the past and one (or two) that seem plausible to apply to your study (NOTE: this / these may change as you continue to collect data and read literature)
- Discussion of methodologies and methods that have been applied to understand the topic. Describe which ones (methodological approach + methods for collecting data/what data

means to you) make sense for your study (NOTE: this / these may change as you continue to collect data and read literature)

- Collect data and organize in a safe/secure location such as UBBox. Data may be collected in a classroom, library research, from interviews, from textbooks or Web sites. The data depends on the questions and the topic
- Code and analyze data as applicable to the project

**Step IV. Final Written Paper, which is produced from a process that includes:\***

- Submitting an initial outline of the paper and a timeline for multiple revisions
- Submitting a first draft of the paper formatted to conform to the American Psychological Association's (APA) most updated version
- Submit final draft of the project at least three (3) weeks before the last week of classes to the advisor. Once the advisor has approved the draft revision, the student will
- Submit to the second faculty member for review and request to set a defense date.
- Following all UB Graduate School formatting and submission guides for a thesis.

**Step V. Prepare and then defend the thesis in a public oral presentation. This includes:**

- Arranging for a date, time, and room to defend the thesis with the appropriate staff person.
- Preparing to and then defending at the event.
- Preparing a revised thesis based on the defense outcome.
- Following all UB Graduate School formatting and submission guides for a thesis.

*\*Strong writing is critical to the capstone. Drafts, revisions, and editing will be necessary. Be sure to accommodate the writing process in your timeline.*