Handbook for Writing the
Capstone Research Project

Doctor of Education in Higher Education Leadership

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CAPSTONE RESEARCH PROJECT HANDBOOK

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Capstone Experience Overview

The Ed.D. in Higher Education Leadership at Maryville was developed not only with coursework spanning seven semesters, but with several cumulative components designed to connect the entire educational experience. The coursework for the Doctorate of Education in Higher Education Leadership at Maryville University is purposely designed to include the diverse array of leadership aspects relevant to higher education. Personalizing the educational experience with specific areas of interest occurs through the key program components of the Portfolio, the Internship Experience, and the Capstone Research Project.

During the first semester of the program, candidates will begin the Capstone Research Project in EDL 731: Introduction to Educational Research and continue throughout the seven semesters of the program, culminating in a presentation of the results from the research project during the last term. Highlighting the importance of higher education leaders engaging in a systematic inquiry of their own practices as administrators, educators, or policymakers, the EDL 731 course will expose candidates to the concepts of quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and action research.

The Introduction to Educational Research course, EDL 731, at the beginning of this doctoral program has two major purposes. The first is to introduce and explore the purpose and modes of inquiry used in educational research so candidates can begin choosing a research topic for the Capstone
Research Project. The second purpose is to equip graduates of the program with research skills required not only for executing this research project but for pursuing other future practical research projects that enable them to continually improve their skills and to address issues in higher education settings. In most cases, the Capstone Research Project will be completed individually; however, candidates can propose to participate in collaborative projects in pairs with approval from the faculty in the Higher Education Leadership program.

**Topic Selection**

Although the topics for this research endeavor will vary, all of the members of the cohort will be conducting and completing these projects throughout the duration of the seven-semester program. Given that this program focuses on leadership in higher education, the topic for the Capstone Research Project needs to have relevance for and a connection to higher education. With the cohort model of shared experiences and coursework, candidates are encouraged to utilize the members of the cohort to brainstorm research questions to guide the study, to discuss analysis and evaluation of the literature, to give feedback on developing the research methodology and the writing of the proposal, to assist in interpreting the data gained from the research project, and to discuss the implications of the research for higher education.

The first task in this research endeavor is selecting a **current and relevant higher education issue** that can be adequately addressed in the Capstone Research Project. In the first year of the program, candidates will be
exposed to a variety of challenging, current issues in higher education. As topics are selected, revised, and narrowed, candidates will begin to review and synthesize the existing literature pertinent to the problem of interest. This review also may assist in the formulation of a significant research question for the Capstone Research Project. Developing a significant and doable research question will be addressed in the EDL 731: Introduction to Educational Research course. The research question, in essence, sets the direction for the Capstone Research Project. Although it is an integral component of the research project, the research question may evolve during the compilation of the review of literature and throughout the development of the research proposal.

**Methodology**

The candidates will grapple with the formulation of the research question during their first semester at Maryville with the guidance of the Introduction to Educational Research Instructor. The process of finding a topic of interest in higher education and narrowing a research question can be challenging but doable with the support of the cohort model. After the direction of the topic is sufficiently defined and narrowed, the methodology portion of the capstone project begins to emerge and evolve. The methodology development for the Capstone Research Project will occur in conjunction with the Advanced Research course, EDL 735. The cohort will enroll in this course during the second semester of the program. In global terms, methodology includes the actions that the researcher will take to collect data addressing the research
question. Specifically, methodology involves identifying what data will be collected from what sources using what techniques to address the formulated research question. If the study is an action research project, the data collection may take place at an institution of higher education where the candidate is employed or has completed an internship experience. Candidates can also select a qualitative approach, a quantitative approach, or a mixed methods approach.

Different types of data collection methodologies are used for different purposes and will yield different results. Often, the topic chosen and the research question appeal to a particular data-collection approach. Qualitative data are often collected to develop insights into the subjective perspective of individuals or groups in particular settings. Examples of qualitative data collection methodologies include but are not limited to interviews, observations, document analysis, and focus groups. The methodology employed can be quantitative in nature such that statistical measures will be calculated. Similarly, quantitative data are used to study events and behaviors objectively often hypothesizing a relationship between key variables. Data are often collected through the form of a survey and statistical analysis is used to examine the data collected. Candidates will be exposed to the key methods for conducting quantitative as well as qualitative studies, and candidates may choose to integrate the two approaches in a mixed-methods research study. Candidates will also learn the techniques
involved in action research which may be employed for the Capstone Research Project.

**Presentation of Capstone Research Project**

Upon the completion of the Capstone Research Project, all candidates will present their projects to the cohort, graduate faculty, and invited guests. This presentation is in addition to the professional conversation and takes place as a major requirement for EDL 744: Capstone and Culminating Experience.

**Overview of the Chapters for the Capstone Research Project**

The Capstone Research Project will be organized in five chapters:

Chapter 1 (Introduction), Chapter 2 (Review of Literature), Chapter 3 (Methodology), Chapter 4 (Results), and Chapter 5 (Conclusion and Discussion). These five chapters present an outline for the written organization of the research project; however, the contents of the chapters will vary greatly due to the variety of problems to be addressed in higher education and the different research approaches that can be employed through these Capstone Projects. In other words, candidates will have considerable autonomy in choosing their topic and research paradigm. The Capstone Research Project is one of the ways that candidates can individualize their doctorate studies.

**Chapter One: Introduction**

The purpose of Chapter One is to introduce the research problem and focus of the study, establish its significance, and share the researcher’s
perspectives on the broader context in which the problem occurs. Chapter One should provide a framework for the problem within the context of higher education, and particularly for any specific arena within higher education in which the problem is most significant. This chapter should include any necessary definitions and should end by clearly stating the research question(s) and/or research hypothesis (if appropriate).

**Chapter Two: Review of the Literature**

The review of the related literature provides a summary and analysis of what is known about the problem or topic. Its function is to educate the reader about the area that was studied. It is NOT a series of abstracts or annotations but rather a summary and analysis of the relationships and differences among relevant studies and research completed about the topic. The review can be organized in a topical fashion, chronologically, or another appropriate organizational scheme.

**Chapter Three: Methodology**

The methodology chapter includes a description of the participants and setting for the data collection, instruments (if applicable), and the overall research design. This chapter should include the specific steps of how the data will be collected for the research project in such a clear fashion that another researcher should be able to replicate the study from the information given. The strategy for the methodology should flow from the literature review presented in Chapter Two. Appendices can be cited in relation to any chapter of the capstone project;
however, most often occur in relation to the Methodology chapter. For example, if interviews were completed as part of the research, the list of questions would be included as an Appendix. Issues of reliability and validity/trustworthiness should be addressed in this chapter.

**Chapter Four: Results**

This chapter synthesizes the data collected from the research project. Typically, some type of descriptive information is provided about the participants, and data (statistics and/or recurring themes) are presented very factually in a form that is organized appropriately to address each of the research questions and/or hypotheses asked in Chapter One. Tables and figures may be used to summarize the data, if appropriate. All tables and figures should be numbered chronologically and titled descriptively.

**Chapter Five: Conclusion and Discussion**

The purpose of Chapter Five is to thoroughly analyze the data from Chapter Four while synthesizing it with the information presented and discussed in Chapters One and Two in order to draw clear, succinct conclusions in relationship to the research question(s). The data collected for the study are presented and discussed in relation to the literature regarding the topic presented in Chapter Two. Limitations of the current study and recommendations for future research are also included in this chapter.
Other Capstone Components

Title Page

Candidates will work with the graduate faculty on creating specific, succinct and effective titles for the individual Capstone Research Project that identify the individuals involved in the study, the setting (if appropriate), and the key variables or theory being studied. This page should provide the title of the project in upper and lowercase letters centered across the page and about one-third of the way from the top of the page. The candidate's name should appear about half-way down the page and centered across the page. Two-thirds down the page should be the words, “A Capstone Research Project Presented to the Faculty of the School of Education of Maryville University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Education”. The Year should be centered below this statement. This page does not have a number on it, but is technically page i. See the Sample Title Page for formatting rules.

Acknowledgements (optional)

As the title indicates, this page is used for individual candidates to thank people who have contributed to the candidate’s completion of the Capstone Research Project. The Acknowledgements page begins on page ii.

Abstract

The abstract is a brief summary (120-250 words) of the scope and topic of the research project. It should give the reader some idea of the question being asked, the participants involved, the methodology employed, and the general
results and implications of the research project without the reader having to read the entire capstone project. The abstract is not designed to include all aspects of the research project but should highlight key findings from the research. It is single spaced with no indentation and typically begins about page iii or iv.

**List of Tables**

The List of Tables should be formatted like the Table of Contents with a listing of all tables cited in the project in chronological order with their titles and the page number on which the table appears. The List of Tables is single spaced with the page number noted in lowercase Roman numerals.

**List of Figures**

The List of Figures should be formatted like the List of Tables with a list of all figures cited in the project in chronological order with their titles and the page number on which the figure appears. The List of Figures is single spaced with the page number noted in lowercase Roman numerals.

**Table of Contents**

The Table of Contents should be as comprehensive as possible, including all headings and subheadings exactly as they appear in the text. The Table of Contents is single spaced with the page number noted in lowercase Roman numerals. See Sample Table of Contents for more information.

**Appendices**

According to Gay (2006), appendices are items that help to clarify your project (e.g., Assessment tools, examples of student work, surveys, samples of
consent forms to be used with research participants, samples of structured
interview questions, surveys or questionnaires used in the research).

Appendices also provide information and data that are pertinent to the study but
are either too lengthy or not important enough to be included in the main body of
the paper. Appendices should be placed in the order in which they are cited in
the paper. The first one is labeled Appendix A, the second one is Appendix B,
etc. The title of the appendix should be appropriate to the contents of the
appendix and should be placed at the top in the center directly under the
“Appendix ?” label. Each appendix should begin on a new page.

References

Every source noted in the Reference List must be cited in the body of the
paper using accurate APA format. Conversely, every source cited in the paper
should appear in the Reference List.

Vita Auctoris

The purpose of the Vita Auctoris is to provide a relatively short
biographical introduction of the researcher. It may include personal and
professional information, but should not be longer than one page single spaced
with no indentation for the first word. The Vita Auctoris appears on the next page
after the References and is numbered accordingly.

Communication

The candidates need to remain in contact with their advisor throughout the
development of the Capstone Research Project. Advisors for the Capstone
Research Project will be assigned to candidates in the beginning of the program. Candidates may also be assigned a reader from Maryville University who will assist in providing feedback on the different chapters of the Capstone Research Project. Instructors for the research courses will also serve as a source of help for questions about the Project. During the seventh semester, candidates will meet with their advisor to discuss final changes to the Project. After changes are made, final approval for the Project needs to be given before the candidate can complete the formal presentation of the results from the study. Final presentations will be made to the cohort and other faculty/staff during the last semester of the program. Final copy of the Capstone Research Project must be submitted and professional presentation of the project must occur prior to a candidate receiving the degree.

**Timeline**

- Selecting and narrowing a topic, formulating a significant research question, and starting the Review of Literature (EDL 731 Introduction to Educational Research—semester 1)

- Refining the study, developing the methodology, completing Chapters 1-3 of the Capstone Project, and submitting request for approval to conduct research through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (EDL 735 Advanced Research—semester 2)
• Collecting the data and analyzing the results, while continuing to add to and revise the Review of Literature (semesters 3-6)

• Completing Chapters 4-5, presenting results to the cohort and faculty members, submitting the final, edited Capstone Research Project in EDL 744: Capstone and Culminating Experience (semester 7)

Institutional Review Board

Candidates conducting research involving human subjects need to obtain institutional approval before data collection may commence. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services defines a human subject as “a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information” (Background section, para. 3). With the guidance of the EDL 735 Advanced Research instructor, candidates will complete the IRB (Institutional Review Board) application during the first year of the program and obtain university approval to conduct research before data collection can begin.

To access Maryville’s Institutional Review Board information and related forms, follow these steps:

1. Go to the Maryville portal (http://my.maryville.edu)
2. On the top toolbar on the site, click on Academic Resources
3. In that menu find Institutional Review Board (information, policies, and forms)
4. OR Link to the IRB site directly (Maryville login required):
https://my.maryville.edu/AcademicServices/Institutional%20Review%20Board%20IRB/Forms/Sorted%20by%20document%20name.aspx

Publication Formatting Requirements

Electronic Submissions

The candidate is responsible for proofreading and submitting an electronic version of the Capstone Research Project with correct spelling, pagination, and formatting each time for review (including drafts). All correspondence between the instructor and candidate shall be kept electronically in order to view edits and changes easily.

Type

The font Arial in size 12 should be used for the entire project.

Margins

The left margin should be one and one half inches, the top margin should be one and one half inches with the running head at one inch and left justified, the bottom and right margins should be one inch. The margin requirements apply to all photocopies, photographs, charts, maps, and other items, which might be included in the appendices.

Line Spacing

The Abstract, Table of Contents, Vita Auctoris page, Acknowledgements page, List of Tables, List of Figures, and any tables that are longer than one page should be single-spaced. All other pages are double spaced.
Indenting

**Do Not Indent:** the first line of the Acknowledgements or Vita Auctoris page, any line on the Abstract Page, or subheadings in the body of the paper.

**Do Indent:** Subheadings in the Table of Contents, paragraphs in the body of the paper.

Centering

All titles should be centered (examples: Abstract, Vita Auctoris, Table of Contents, Chapter One). Subheadings should be left justified, not centered according to the appropriate level of the subheading as specified in the APA Style Guide.

Page Numbering

Pages in the body of the paper should be numbered in the top right hand corner. Page 1 is not numbered. Page numbering starts on page 2. The appendices are not numbered. The Introductory Pages (Vita Auctoris, Acknowledgements, Abstract, List of Tables, List of Figures, Table of Contents) have a different numbering system using lower case Roman numerals (i, ii, iii, iv, etc.).

Running Head

A 3-5 word summary of the title of the project should be used as a running head on all pages of the project except the introductory pages and appendices. The running head is left justified at the top of the page. On the title page the
words “Running Head: SHORT TITLE IN ALL CAPS” should be noted. On all other pages just the SHORT TITLE IN ALL CAPS should appear.
How Involvement in the First-Year Seminar Course Affects Institutional Collaboration

Mary Maryville, B.S., M.A.

A Capstone Research Project Presented to the Faculty of the School of Education of Maryville University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Education

YEAR
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