

Capstone Assessment HUMN 491, “Senior Thesis” Spring 2013

What was assessed:

HUMN 491 is an independent study course in which a student produces a major paper, usually 20-40 pages. The following procedures, recently revised, are posted on CANVAS:

The purpose of HUMN 491, “Senior Thesis,” is to facilitate a student’s special academic interest. It is an independent study course, and enrollment requires written permission of the Coordinator of Humanities. Contact is easy via email, gsmith@ewu.edu, or phone, 359-6023.

Students enrolled in this course will have chosen a topic for a formal paper, and will have recruited a regular faculty member to serve as mentor. These issues must be discussed with the Coordinator of Humanities.

The mentor’s role is

- 1) to judge that the student’s project is worth four credits,
- 2) to confer with the student at least three times during the term,
- 3) to advise the student when the final paper is ready for a second reader, and
- 4) to recommend a grade based on content at the end of the term.

An email assuring progress should be sent to the Coordinator of Humanities midway through the term.

A final paper must be submitted to the Coordinator of Humanities in hardcopy by the last day of regular classes.

The Coordinator of Humanities reads all such theses, checking primarily for editorial correctness, and will look forward to reading yours.

Assessment procedures:

Because each student enrolled in HUMN 491 works on a separate, independent project in different disciplines, there is no way to assess a common content of the various projects. Thus, our assessment had to rely on the specific testimony of the individual students about the course, and on the grades given for their work by their mentors and the Coordinator of Humanities.

Eleven students were enrolled during spring quarter, 2013, and a survey with six questions based on the description of capstones on Eastern’s website (written by Mark Baldwin) was sent to each via email after they finished their projects. They were asked to weigh their responses to the six questions on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most positive. They were also asked to state their topics and to offer comments. Nine of the eleven responded, giving the following results:

- 1) The procedures of this course were clear and helpful.
5, 5, 5, 5, 4, 5, 4, 3, 5, Total = 41 Average = 4.56

2) My mentor was helpful in reaching the goals of this course.

5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 4, 5, 5, Total = 44 Average = 4.89

3) The subject matter was interesting.

5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, Total = 45 Average = 5.0

4) The subject matter required that I draw on previous learning at the university.

5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, Total = 45 Average = 5.0

5) I learned more in this course than I originally expected.

5, 3, 5, 5, 5, 5, 3, 5, 5, Total = 41 Average = 4.56

6) I would recommend this course to other students.

5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, Total = 45 Average = 5.0

Before sending, please state the title of your project and add comments here:

Response #1: The title of my project is Lagrangian Interpolation. Dr. Gentle is an excellent mentor, providing ample guidance and encouragement. My paper would not have been possible without him. I've used material from many math courses I've taken at EWU, focusing primarily on Linear Algebra, Advanced Linear Algebra, and three quarters of Modern Algebra. The intended audience of the paper are undergraduate mathematics students in their senior year, preferably with an emphasis in abstract algebra. It's my opinion that the paper has fulfilled its intended goals of broadly combining what I've learned from my coursework at EWU, as well as providing an opportunity to research specific topics on my own. I am very satisfied with the experience overall.

Response #2: The title of my project was "A Philosophical Inquiry Into the Omniscient Properties of God". Throughout the quarter, I not only relied upon study methods I had learned throughout my collegiate career, but also had to develop a more efficient method of research. It was definitely a learning experience, to which I hope other students will have an opportunity to take advantage of.

Response #3: My topic is Fourier analysis. This thesis project is an especially good way to connect the material from the multitude of math classes which a math major takes. This connection happens through drawing on the tools we have been given to address an arbitrary problem in mathematics, or in my case, to explore an idea which has been present throughout my studies, but only on the very periphery. I particularly appreciate being given the latitude to explore the avenues of meaning from a personally constructed view point. Having freedom in our studies in this way develops one of the most critical skills of a mathematician - the ability to frame questions.

Response #4: "Dewey's Education: How current structures could benefit from past ideals."

Response #5: My thesis is titled "The Vibrant Pulse: The Vitality of Voice in 20th-Century American Fiction."

I only wish we had more than one quarter to compile and complete our work, or maybe I should have taken a lighter course load. I would advise other students considering this course to make sure that their other courses are light so as to give this course/project their all.

I also think that some formatting preferences would be nice---a bulleted list or something simple,

even if it's just for the presentation aspect of the finished piece.

All in all, I am thankful for the depth of study this course allowed me, and I am glad I was able to sort of indulge my own interests and validate them academically. I felt my most cherished, profound academic moments culminate satisfyingly in this last hurrah of reading, re-reading, and writing.

Response #6: My topic is of happiness and the title of my paper is:

Happiness: In the mind, simple and non-external

I found this course to be a very well put together course, for I have read many philosophers but to give a clear idea of the beginning of what kind of paper I have chosen in order to research is a very good start for my graduate school beginnings. So being able to choose my own topic is a reliable educational continuation of my learning. The option to provide your own topic is a sensible beginning to the philosophical programs.

Response #7: The title of my project is "Human Goodness: The Connection to Happiness or Lack Thereof", in which I will be assessing two philosophical works of Philippa Foot along with my own observations about the implications of human goodness to the connection of human happiness. As for this course - I think from what I've gathered from other students who do a regular capstone course, it seems about the same and gets the objective of what a culminating project should be. Even though this is considered a humanities course, I found it to be effective as serving as a substitution for a philosophy capstone and was able to use my learning from my philosophy classes at Eastern to incorporate specific philosophical language, theories, and past studies into my project research.

Response #8: "A cultural and religious inquiry into the perspectives of death and dying"

I worked with Dr. Steiner on my thesis and what I really liked was that he simply asked me to write. Period. I did my own work on my own schedule and we were really in contact during the last 3 weeks of the quarter. But he was always available to answer my questions over email and was very respectful and honest about my work.

Response #9: The title of my project is "Solutions to Fluid Dynamic problems using Matlab". I am very glad I decided to take this course. Being able to work on a topic that I am very interested in and apply my knowledge and techniques from other classes made it more exciting for me. I would highly recommend that every senior take this course.

Interpretation of results:

These quantitative and qualitative results are very positive. However, three of the students were less than totally satisfied with the clarity of the procedures. One reason might have been their insecurity about the grade their mentor might recommend. Nothing should be done to interfere with the relationship between the mentor and the student. At the same time, the Coordinator of Humanities is always emphatic that editorial correctness is absolutely essential. Another reason students may have been less than totally satisfied with the procedures is the way they are phrased in written form. They have been recently revised and will be again as the need arises.