



The Liberal Studies Capstone Paper Requirement

for Plan E and Pre-Credential/ITEP Students

The different concentrations in the Liberal Studies major are carefully designed to build depth and breadth of knowledge, as well as to provide tools for discovery in a particular discipline or subject area. The ability to research and write a major paper in the field of the concentration is a summative expression of several aspects of our program: mastery of a subject area in some depth, mastery of university skills in writing, reading, research, and presentation; and mastery of the ability to integrate across coursework and subjects.

For this purpose, each student is required to write a **graded research paper** written, in most cases, in the fourth course in their chosen concentration. The paper will be approximately 10 - 12 pages in length and will address an important issue in the concentration field. It should represent a sustained effort in essay writing organized to argue and support a thesis; a series of lesson plans, several shorter papers, biographical sketches, or a narrative are not acceptable. The essay will be evaluated by faculty in the Liberal Studies office according to a rubric designed and approved by the ITEP/Liberal Studies Program Committee (see "Rubric" below). An evaluation by this rubric insures a minimum level of writing and research competency for every program graduate.

The instructors in the designated capstone courses will forward all graded capstone papers to the Liberal Studies Office at the end of the semester. Students may pick up their papers in the Liberal Studies Office after their papers have been evaluated and they have been notified that they have met the requirement. If a paper is not acceptable, the student must make an appointment with the Liberal Studies Director to discuss revisions and set a time for resubmission.

Before submitting their papers, students should study the scoring rubric so that they understand the criteria by which their papers will be evaluated.

Here are some tips: It is important that each paper establish a clear thesis which will be argued and supported. Papers should be checked for grammar and carefully developed sentences and paragraphs. Pages should be numbered, and the paper should include a Works Cited page and/or a bibliography. All sources must be cited properly in the paper, following either MLA or APA Style Guidelines. These style guidelines are usually found in any College English Handbook, or you can find them online. (Colleges and Universities often have links on their webpages; good examples can be found at <<http://webster.commnet.edu/mla/index.shtml>> or <http://webster.commnet.edu/apa/apa_intro.htm>)

Rubric for Assessment of Liberal Studies Capstone Papers

Every pre-credential Liberal Studies student must submit to the Liberal Studies Office a *graded* capstone paper of approximately 10 - 12 pages that has been written for the capstone course in his or her concentration. When the student requests subject matter clearance for student teaching, the capstone paper is read holistically by two faculty readers. Papers are scored in the range of **5** (Superior) to **1** (Unacceptable). A paper must receive a score of **3** or above by both readers in order to fulfill the capstone paper requirement.

Capstone papers are evaluated in five areas:

1. Conceptual knowledge of the concentration subject area
2. Clear and effective arguments
3. Well-developed paragraphs and competent sentence structures
4. Mastery of the mechanics of Standard Written English
5. Appropriate research methods

For each score point below, characteristics of each of the five areas are listed in sequence.

Score of 5: Superior

1. The paper illustrates the student's deep conceptual knowledge of the concentration subject area and the ability to select an appropriate topic for research.
2. The paper demonstrates superior ability to construct a thesis (controlling idea) and to organize and develop a substantial, balanced and convincing defense of it.
3. The paper is characterized by excellent prose: fluid syntax, appropriate diction, purposeful and coherent structures.
4. The paper has few errors of sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation.
5. The paper reflects the student's awareness of the range of appropriate source material (library and on-line) and a superior ability to select, incorporate, and responsibly document its use.

Score of 4: Very Good

1. The paper demonstrate the student's strong conceptual knowledge of the concentration subject area and the ability to select an appropriate topic for research.
2. The paper exhibits the student's clear ability to construct and defend a thoughtful thesis.
3. The paper is well written: varied syntax, good diction, clear structure.
4. The paper may have some errors of sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation, but the student demonstrates mastery of Standard Written English.
5. The paper reflects the student's awareness of the range of appropriate source material (library and on-line) and a good ability to select, incorporate, and responsibly document its use.

Score of 3: Adequate

1. The paper demonstrates the student's ability to address an issue of importance within the concentration subject area.
2. The paper has an adequate thesis and a fairly capable defense.
3. The paper is fairly well written: sentences are correct, diction is accurate, and organization is workmanlike.
4. The paper demonstrates mastery of most elements of Standard Written English.
5. The paper demonstrates the student's working knowledge of the process of research and the practices of documentation.

Score of 2: Marginal, not acceptable

1. The paper shows weakness in the student's ability to relate the topic chosen to fundamental understanding of the concentration subject area.
2. The thesis is poorly developed and/or the defense is weak.
3. The writing is mostly clear, but sentences may be consistently too short, awkward or lacking in variety, and diction may be inappropriate.
4. The paper exhibits errors in English writing that suggest the writer has not mastered key elements of Standard Written English.
5. The paper shows a weakness in the student's knowledge of resources and the ability to incorporate them into research.

Score of 1: Inadequate, not acceptable

1. The paper suggests the student cannot relate the topic chosen to a fundamental understanding of the concentration subject area.
2. The paper lacks a clear thesis and shows little understanding of what constitutes evidence in the subject area.
3. Errors in sentence structure, diction, and usage prevent the reader from clear understanding the meaning.
4. The paper exhibits little mastery of the conventions of Standard Written English.
5. The paper suggests the student lacks the knowledge of how to conduct and document research in this subject area.