



Confidence Through Capstone



Sweaty, you push the heavy wood door and enter a classroom of students that all seem to know each other. While trying to act casual, you find a seat near, but not too near, another one of the anxious looking students. Freshman year of college, on the first day of school, during the first class of the day, you never imagined everything would be so foreign. High School had been a breeze and you thought college would too, until the realization that the real world is looming too close for comfort, and uncertainty builds in the pit of your gut.

Students in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) are guided through their four years at Texas Tech University by professors who want students to succeed. During the final stages of earning a degree, students enroll in courses called capstones. In all seven of the CASNR departments, these courses are designed to help the student gain the confidence needed for their final step graduation.

“Capstone classes give you the ability to apply all the skills you’ve learned throughout college,” said Keegan Langford, a student majoring in agricultural communications in Tech’s Department for Agricultural Communications and Education. “It’s really more hands-on learning and has allowed me to discover what my strengths are, and how I can use them in the real world.”

Unlike regular courses, Langford said a capstone

class is different because it is more applied learning. Instead of listening to a professor lecture about a topic, students actually have the opportunity to go out and apply their learning by doing projects and other assignments.

In the Department for Agricultural Communications and Education, students earning an agricultural communications degree take two capstone courses, Agricultural Communications Campaigns and the Development of Agricultural Publications.

For the Department of Landscape Architecture,

Aura Dominguez, a senior landscape architecture major said her capstone course is exceptionally difficult because of the extent of research students are required to complete. For the final project, students in landscape architecture take a field trip to Denver, Colorado, to check out a project site. Dominguez said they are then able to create a “new” space for the people based on their own research, insights and ideas.



Dr. Darren Hudson discusses the traits of being a leader to his students in the agricultural economics capstone class.

“The course provides me with the opportunity to work with people my profession and see how the work and the processes they go through,” Dominguez said. “It also gives me an insight as to what the workplace will feel like out in the professional world.”

In the duration of student’s undergraduate career, some assignments are given to the students to prepare them for a test, but with others, the professor has different plans. Darren Hudson, Ph.D, a professor in the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics

said he gives an assignment in his capstone course that is designed to build up student's strengths and work on their weaknesses.

"In the capstone class, it really isn't about new material," Hudson said. "It's about thinking about everything you've learned and how it ties together and then relates back to the job that you're likely to have."

During his time as a professor of agricultural economics teaching the capstone course, Hudson said he ran into many different kinds of students. Some try to coast through the course while others try to achieve the highest grade possible. Of all the students, one stuck out to Hudson in particular.

"I just told him one day, maybe this isn't for you. Maybe you need to go do something else," Hudson said. "He just disappeared. I didn't know where he went but he came back about three years later and said, 'I'm ready to go back. I made a lot of money, I worked a lot of long hours, and I had a lot of fun, but I'm ready to go back to school.'"

In the student's last semester, he reached Hudson's capstone course. Like many students before him, he completed the book assignment, identified his strengths and weaknesses, wrote the paper and finally graduated.

"A couple years later, I started getting emails from him while he was a captain in the Marine Corps," Hudson said. "He started sending me books he was reading that related to the assignment and told me how it applied to his life now, and how they helped him while he was in Afghanistan."

By their senior year, students typically do not have a lot more on their mind than graduation, but finding jobs after graduation is why students attend places of higher education.

Kerry Griffis-Kyle, Ph.D, a professor in the Department of Natural Resource Management, said she likes having the opportunity to make a significant impact on student's ability to get jobs in the field by teaching the capstone class.

"Students benefit in a number of ways. One of the main ones is they get confidence in being able to do some of these activities." Griffis-Kyle said. "So for example, they may apply for jobs that they normally wouldn't have before. That also means they can say, 'I have done that before, so they have a better chance of getting the job.'"

The student's ability to gain confidence in the workforce is one of the main reasons why professors in CASNR teach capstone courses, and why it has been successful throughout the years.

Kaitlin Spraberry, a recent alumna from the Department of Agricultural Education and Communications, said her leadership experience in the capstone course gave her confidence in the workplace she could not have gained through any other opportunity. She is currently the management coordinator at Triple 8 Management, a music management company in Austin, Texas.

"Ultimately, the goal after graduation is to take what you've learned in class, add it to your professional experiences, and use those things to make yourself successful in the job market," Spraberry said. "I learned more about trusting my instincts and to be confident

in that the things I'd learned in class had equipped me with the right tools to be successful." 



Aura Dominguez discusses a landscape architecture project with her classmate in the landscape architecture pavilion. "

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Meredith Holdsworth
San Antonio, Texas

