M.A. TESOL Capstone Project

Overview:

The **M.A. TESOL Capstone Project (CP)** provides students with an opportunity to demonstrate their in-depth knowledge and practical expertise in a specific area of the TESOL discipline, and to showcase their work through two formats: a 15-20 page academic paper, and a professional conference presentation. The Capstone Project, completed in the context of ENG 891, builds on work the students have completed for their M.A. TESOL coursework – for example, ENG 730 research paper; ENG 732 research project, ENG 724 curriculum project; ENG 731 lesson plans, among others (see sample CP scenarios below). CPs are meant to be opportunities for reflection, expansion, and meaningful revision of coursework which students view as central to their professional development. For this reason, in general, students are discouraged from launching brand-new projects in their final semester for their CP. In selecting a focus for their CP, students should be able to demonstrate how their CP builds on prior work in a meaningful and productive way.

Students' CPs should be consistent with their career goals; a CP work should be viewed as a culminating display of ability, demonstrating that M.A. TESOL graduate is prepared to become a professional in the field of TESOL. The excellence in writing and oral presentation requirements reflect the competencies that are essential to success in the field of TESOL. The CP academic paper is intended to assess students' familiarity with the rigors of writing for a professional audience in the TESOL field.

The CP is prominently featured in the student's M.A. TESOL Portfolio; the reflection and expansion/revision work of the CP paper and presentation is carried out in the context of ENG 891, under consultation with the students' faculty portfolio advisors and peers. The CP yields two products which are required components in the students' M.A. TESOL Portfolio:

a. <u>An academic paper</u> [15-20 pages]
   A paper that demonstrates your in-depth knowledge and practical expertise in a specific area of TESOL and may take on a variety of formats (e.g., an action research paper, a curriculum development plan, a theoretical essay, a grant proposal, a program assessment plan, among others). While the format, scope, and purpose of papers will vary, all papers are expected to include: discussion of actual ESL/EFL learning contexts, a solid review of relevant literature, and applications to classroom practice. Papers should also demonstrate students' ability to write competently for a target audience of TESOL professionals, using logical argumentation, appropriate formal voice, and standard academic writing conventions.

b. <u>A handout for your MATESOL Conference presentation</u>

As with other sections of the portfolio, please be sure to include a cover note to introduce the Capstone Project Paper and Presentation handout.

Students are free to collaborate during the preparation of their CP work and are strongly encouraged to seek on-going peer input/critique. Students are also free to co-present at the M.A. TESOL Student Conference, but each individual student must independently prepare a CP paper with a unique focus.

Evaluation Criteria

CPs are evaluated on the following criteria:

- *Originality* – The CP displays creativity by exceeding or going outside of clichéd approaches, with respect to content, inquiry methods, or pedagogical approach.

- *Relevance* - The topic addressed in the CP reflects relevant and timely issues in the TESOL field, and the students' insights promote reflection and dialogue about those issues.

- *Integration of literature* - The CP demonstrates the students' knowledge and understanding of current literature published in the TESOL field on the particular topic, and effectively and accurately integrates that literature base. The literature sources logically build towards the writer's own perspective on the issue. The paper consistently and effectively uses evidence from source material, including quotations, paraphrases, and summary statements, such that that students' stance on the literature is clear. Literature review should include a minimum of 15 scholarly sources, with the majority of those sources published in the last 10 years. As a general rule, the number of sources should be adequate enough to create the context for the CP topic and to demonstrate understanding of the significance of the CP topic.

- *Academic Writing Skills* – The CP demonstrates clear, coherent, and rhetorically appropriate academic style. References conform to APA conventions. Paper has been carefully edited and spell-checked.

- *Oral Presentation Skills* – Students able to deliver a professional presentation of CP highlights, through a 25-minute oral presentation at the M.A. TESOL Graduate Student Conference.

- *Reflection* – Students are able to provide a reflective, self-assessment of what they have learned from carrying out this capstone project, and how their views as a TESOL professional have been shaped by this capstone project experience. This reflection is documented in a cover note for the CP.

Sample Capstone Project Scenarios

Scenario #1:
As part of their ENG 730 coursework, a student does an extensive literature review on the role of L1 in university EFL settings, with a particular focus on the Korean EFL context. The student decides to expand her knowledge base on the L1 issue by refining her literature review and delving into literature on effective L2 teacher training practices. The student uses her insights to develop a 1-day teacher training module, targeting in-service Korean EFL teachers, on effective use of the L1 in EFL classrooms. The students intends to use her CP as a basis for organizing professional development opportunities when she returns to Korea after graduation.

Scenario #2:
A student researched and did a demonstration on using the Language Experience Approach/using pictures to stimulate writing for ENG 732. As part of his ENG 733, he is a student teacher in a beginning level noncredit class at CCSF this semester, and, for his CP, he decides to do further research related to this technique and materials (reading up on published literature, interviewing Ts, observing other Ts' classes). He tries out the technique with his ENG 733 students and develops a set of his own materials.

Scenario #3
Student develops a curriculum plan in his ENG 724 course and then decides to expand or adapt for a specific teaching context by interviewing teachers, piloting materials, and getting feedback on curriculum from educators working in the field and target context.

Scenario #4:
Student develops a set of teaching materials in English 733 that fit her goals and target student population, which they want to expand and present. In preparing for 891 and the TCP, student does an extensive literature review, drawing from prior class work, consulting librarians and faculty, and doing database searches. Student also interviews 733 mentor and collects feedback from students in the class. The student focuses her CP around an analysis of how the materials enabled her to address particular pedagogical challenges and achieve specific L2 pedagogical goals.

Scenario #5:
Student does an extensive research project in ENG 737 Corpus Linguistics and decides to use her research findings to inform pedagogical practice in a particular target teaching context and student audience by developing a series of corpus-informed classroom activities.

For students completing theses, community service learning projects as part of the Certificate in Immigrant Literacies (CIL), or other major independent study work concurrent with ENG 891: These projects fulfill the Capstone Project expectations. Please note that students doing theses, CIL, or other supervised independent study work are still required to complete the 2 portfolio components (15-20 page academic paper and conference presentation).

- *For students doing independent studies in their final semester*: students should consult their supervising faculty member to include a 15-20 paper report as part of their final assessment so that the student's work is commensurate with CP requirements.

- *For students completing the Certificate in Immigrant Literacies (CIL)*: students will be required to write a 15-20 page paper about their service learning project in fulfillment of CP requirements.

- *For thesis students*: students are required to produce a 15-20 page manuscript based on their thesis findings in fulfillment of CP requirements. Ideally, thesis students would work with their thesis advisors to craft a 15-20 page manuscript suitable for submission to a professional journal.

Capstone Project Scenarios to Avoid

Type 1: Pedagogical projects based on good ideas but (a) not clear about teaching goals/learner needs or (b) not informed by research and pedagogical theory; or (c) not informed by to a teaching context.
Scenario: An M.A. TESOL student wants to focus on a particular lesson plan that has been very effective, using an activity that was first seen during an observation, and it has most recently been used in an English institute class which the student taught over the summer. Because it is so motivating and successful in the classroom, this seems a good focus for a capstone project, but the student did not write an extensive rationale for this lesson and has had trouble finding articles by doing library database searches. Thinking it may be related to motivation, she pulls a few concepts from English 426 readings but the connections to the lesson are not clear.

Type 2: Research that is not clear about research questions or relevant prior research.
Scenario: After long being interested in the use of authentic materials in TESOL classroom activities and assignments, an M.A. TESOL student decides to research authentic materials. She decides to research authentic materials, so she sends out an e-mail questionnaire with the questions, (1) Do you use authentic materials in your ESL classes? (2) If so, how often? (3) Do students like using authentic materials? (4) What are the pluses and minuses of using authentic materials? One teacher asks what she means by authentic materials, and the student explains, she means things like newspapers, television, and movies. When asked what she is trying to find out, she says she wants to show that authentic materials are better.

Type 3: Last minute addition of surveys or other data collection that is not well planned
Scenario: M.A. TESOL student decides to use a curriculum project from English 724 Curriculum and Assessment for his capstone project, and due to a series of unforeseen circumstances, he has not had a chance to pilot his teaching materials. Just two weeks before the conference, he decides to collect some quick survey data to support his pedagogical approach that uses a learner centered model, a process syllabus, and a learner-designed project. He types up a brief survey designed to be easy to answer and sends it to everyone he knows. It asks people to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 how much they like (a) learner centered teaching and (b) a process syllabus and includes a space for optional comments.

Type 4: Last minute shifts of topic/theme without existing literature review and prior reading
Scenario: Half way through the semester, an M.A. TESOL student attends an exciting workshop on the use of creative dramatics in teaching ESL/EFL to children. Though she has not taken English 724 Performance and does not know much about use of drama techniques in language teaching, she finds this workshop and the sample activities very exciting. She has not read or written about the use of drama in teaching, and looking through her course books, readers, and personal library, she can only find a few passages about the use of drama. She has not seen this used in a classroom and does not know teachers who are using creative dramatics, and she has not been able to make contact with the workshop presenter either.

Questions to ask before you shift topic:
(1) Does it build on your existing literature review or on other literature reviews you have done as part of other assignments? Are you familiar with the research or theory needed?
(2) Does it build on your practical experience in meaningful ways?
(3) Do you have access to people who have relevant experience and expertise?
(4) Does it draw on any of your prior class assignments, such as lesson plans, research projects, or curriculum plans?
The answer should be yes to most of these questions, before you consider switching topics.

Alternative to switching topic:
Trouble shoot and adjust your existing project to make it more interesting to you and informative to your reader in some ways. Such as [add short list of strategies]

Organizational Guidelines

Please follow the following guidelines for organizing and formatting your Capstone Project (CP) paper and presentation. Note that these are general guidelines, and, in consultation with your faculty advisor, you may be able to adapt these guidelines to best suit the purposes and scope of your CP work.

Recommended Organization of the Capstone Project Paper

Title Page (project title, your name, graduate program, and date)

1. Introduction (1-2 pages)
   - Overview of the project scope, in which you set the stage for the purpose and scope of your capstone project
   - Rationale for the Capstone Project (why you chose this particular focus)
   - Road map – tell the reader how this paper is organized

2. Background (4-5 pages)
   - Literature Review which provides a foundation for the CP focus (in-text citations must follow APA format)

3. Body (8-10 pages)

   For research-oriented CPs:
   - Research questions
   - Research context and sample description
   - Methods and tools
   - Data analysis and interpretation

   For teaching-oriented CPs:
   - Teaching/learning goals and objectives
   - Pedagogical processes and rationale
   - Illustrative examples
   - Analysis of impact on learning and teaching, including feedback you have gleaned from actual applications

4. Conclusions and Final Reflections (2-3 pages)
   - What future research or efforts extend from this work?
   - How does this CP contribute to your long-term trajectory as a TESOL professional?

5. References (formatted using APA guidelines, minimum 15 scholarly sources)

6. Appendices (varies, depending on CP scope and purpose)