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Enhanced student learning and scholarly productivity through capstone projects

Bruce G. Hancock, Jane M. Gervasio, Iftekhhar Kalsekar, Julie M. Koehler, Mary H. Andritz

Background: Longitudinal capstone projects are performed during the students' fourth professional year under the direction of faculty mentors. The process involves educating students in research design with emphasis on methods for communicating project results. The process has been further refined to generate opportunities for faculty to satisfy scholarly activity criteria.

Methods: Concepts of research design, proposal development, data analysis, abstract construction and manuscript development are presented to students during their third professional year in preparation for capstone projects. Surveys completed by students allow pairing of faculty mentors with similar research interests. Before project commencement, students and faculty mentors must demonstrate competency related to research and Institutional Review Board processes. At various stages of completion of the capstone project, students present their study results through a poster, an oral presentation, and a manuscript.

Results: This year, 155 students and 27 faculty mentors are participating in the capstone project process totaling 93 projects. Projects include retrospective research, drug utilization reviews, informational surveys and textbook construction. Twenty students presented their senior projects at national and state meetings. One book project has been accepted for publication and multiple journal articles are being pursued. Several drug utilization evaluations have been completed by students at rotation sites helping to meet hospital requirements.

Conclusion: Student participation in capstone projects increases their knowledge of the research process and assists faculty with scholarship endeavors. Involvement in poster and oral presentations further enhances communication skills and helps students develop strategies for adding value to practice sites and improving patient care.