

The Capstone Project

BAS Digital Marketing

The capstone is your final project for the BAS Digital Marketing degree, encapsulating what you have learned across classes and showing that you can apply your skills to solve problems. It is essentially a year-long project that spans multiple courses and asks more from students than what might be expected from other colleges and universities.

When asking local employers what they seek in job applicants, we heard a clear answer. They need individuals who are able to take initiative and identify what needs to get done. Rarely in the business world is the work to be completed neat and clean; managers and project leaders need to point the way forward. The capstone project has been designed to test your ability to both identify problems and provide solutions, and it can be much more time consuming than most students imagine.

BAS Capstone Support Courses

Beyond the three capstone courses outlined below, students will take advanced research and measurement classes that will help prepare them for the capstone project.

MKTG 461 Marketing Research II applies many of the ideas learnt in MKTG 261, with students conducting research that will lead to their capstone projects. It is important that participants come to the class with an idea of who their capstone client will be; projects in this class are not theoretical. Students are expected have a knowledge of establishing research questions, crafting surveys, recruiting participants, conducting secondary research, and translating research findings into marketing objectives and strategy.

Beginning next year, students will be required to have completed MKTG 461 before they start the capstone classes with MKTG 481. While that is not in effect yet, we ask all students to strongly consider the recommendation to do just that. There have been too many students failing the capstone courses because they do not have the foundational research completed before attempting the capstone.

MKTG 462 Data Visualization and Advanced Analytics applies many of the ideas learnt in MKTG 262, with students exploring more advanced concepts of measuring digital marketing results and translating that into meaningful insights and recommendations. There is hands-on instruction with Tableau, discussion on data visualization design principles, and an introduction to data modeling and advanced analytics. Students are expected to have a knowledge of key performance indicators for marketing, experience with Google Analytics, and an understanding of both site side and third-party tracking.

Again, students should have their capstone client picked out before enrolling. They will create a dataset for that client that can then be used as part of the final capstone project. For this reason, MKTG 462 will be a prerequisite before taking the second and third capstone courses.

BAS Capstone Courses

Students will complete a series of three classes that provide a guided experience on how to complete the comprehensive end of program capstone project. It is designed to be large in scope and take a full year to complete. For this reason, students need to plan ahead and stay focused on meeting deadlines.

MKTG 481 – Capstone I

Students begin a comprehensive integrated marketing project on behalf of a local business, applying their learning from previous courses. They will develop and complete a capstone prospectus, which will then guide work in the two successive classes.

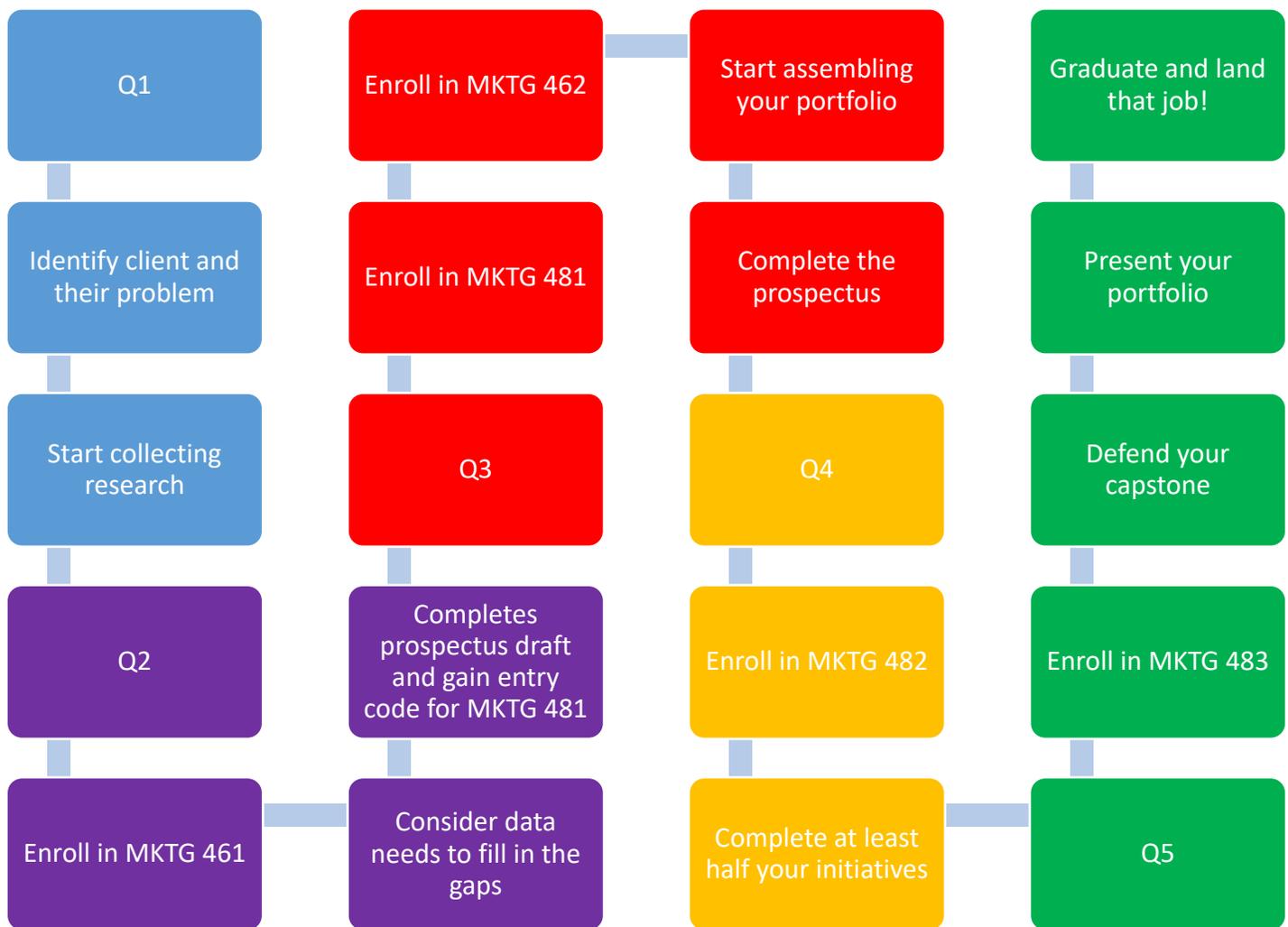
MKTG 482 – Capstone II

Students continue working on a comprehensive integrated marketing project, executing their capstone deliverables outlined in the prospectus for MKTG 481. After completing this class, students should be able to maintain an ongoing relationship with the external organization serving as a client for the project, establish project deliverables to serve the larger project needs, apply learning from previous courses to complete client work, assess progress and optimize marketing tactics based on results.

MKTG 483 – Capstone III

Students will complete their comprehensive integrated marketing project, presenting their capstone learnings to their clients, faculty and the advisory board. After completing this class, students should be able to deliver a completed project to the client, share learnings with a diverse audience of client(s), faculty, department advisory board, and peers, articulate possible next steps to build on project learnings, and connect learnings from the capstone project to career planning and personal branding.

Capstone Project Timeline



As you can see from the timeline above, the whole project really should take over a full year to complete. This doesn't include the time needed to identify a potential client and articulate their specific challenge you hope to address with your consultative work. We have baked in real world client activities in earlier marketing courses so all students have some experience with how challenging this task can be and are prepared. What is expected of the capstone is something akin to a full agency – client experience, without the safety net of it simply being a “learning opportunity.”

If things are not working out, you will likely need to go back to the drawing board and identify a different challenge, or in some cases an altogether new client. If you find yourself in this situation, you must promptly check in with your Capstone advisor to determine what this means for completing Capstone course requirements. Keep in mind you will need to do the underlying work again for the

new client in order to successfully move through the capstone project. However, you would need to do the underlying work again for the new client in order to successfully move through the capstone project.

Choosing a Client, a Problem, and Areas of Study

There's no simple answer on how to find your client. There will be compromise for certain, as what may seem like the "perfect" client will inevitably have you clear a few hurdles and ask you to see things differently than you might like. A good perspective for narrowing the field is thinking about which companies are likely to hand over data to a student to work on their behalf. That won't be Microsoft or Amazon or other larger corporations. Even medium-sized businesses will hesitate to be transparent with you out of fear that their information might be compromised.

Students would be wise to look for small enough businesses that need help with their marketing but cannot afford to put money or manpower behind the effort. These organizations are likely to be more flexible as they need your services but cannot afford to hire someone who can execute high-level marketing strategy. Having some personal connection with a business or nonprofit can also facilitate the sharing of data and might result in a client more receptive to big-picture thinking.

When selecting a client, you need to make sure that there is a specific challenge you can research and address and solve. Saying "they need to make money" or "they need a campaign" is not acceptable. This task is further complicated in that you will need to help solve the problem by employing three to four sub disciplines of marketing to address the issue. This is not unusual in the real world and therefore required for the capstone project. We want you to demonstrate mastery of multiple areas of promotional marketing in this project, which we believe will help increase your chances of securing high-level employment post-graduation.

To better help you think about those various sub disciplines and how they may impact your particular client each student will complete the marketing discipline checklist assignment. This form has you consider to what degree are you knowledgeable about certain subjects, how much experience you have had putting that knowledge in to practice, and which of those sub disciplines you actually enjoy. This exercise not only helps jog your memory of the many different topics you were exposed to across the program, but also helps you start building your elevator pitch on what kind of marketer you are and what roles are the best fit for you.

MKTG 461 Marketing Research II and MKTG 462 Data Visualization and Advanced Analytics both have assignments that connect your capstone topic to the curriculum. While these two classes are recommended for your third and fourth quarters in the program, you should have already selected a client and done initial work on the capstone before enrolling in those classes. This is why we are asking you to start thinking about your capstone now, right at the beginning of the program.

Marketing Research II could be described as flexible lab environment for working on the inevitable capstone project. It will have you articulate a research question that better helps understand the client's issue and what marketing work might be needed. Students will conduct extensive secondary research on the company, their product / service, the competition, the industry in which they all compete, external factors impacting consumers, and other situational elements that affect how you might go about crafting campaigns. They also will identify what is missing from the known research and propose conducting first party research to fill in the gaps. The class will end with participants sharing the way forward with their research project, thus having much of the heavy lifting of the capstone project already complete.

However...

Many students haphazardly choose clients, assuming they can make it work or that they will choose their "real" client at a later time. This is certainly a possibility, but those students should then expect that they will need to start the whole process over again once they settle on their true focus.

Data Visualization and Advanced Analytics is a more structured course, where new topics of study are introduced. But it does ask for students to work on assembling a data set that will help assist with drawing insights for the capstone client. Again, coming to the course with not only a client lined up but a solid idea of what the problem they face will really help you make the most of this three-month period.

Making the Case with a Prospectus

Students then need to turn their attention towards building their prospectus document, where they detail who the client is, what is the problem, why this requires the help of the marketer, related objectives, a strategy, and the sub disciplines that make up your initiatives and will be used to guide tactics and measurement. It should be about six to eight pages long, which translates to around 3000 – 4000 words. This prospectus is a formal document that is quite different from most of the informal papers and assignments submitted in previous courses. It must be formatted using APA guidelines, and be scholarly in tone so it is appropriate for publishing.

It is surprising to the faculty how many students are unfamiliar with outlining, and those that do understand the concept still resist using it as a preliminary draft for constructing written documents. You will be asked to submit an outline before the actual prospectus document so it is easy to trace all the different elements included and see that they follow in a clear, linear fashion. The lengthy annotated bibliography created in MKTG 461 will come in handy here, as you can easily slip in evidence you have collected as part of the literature review.

Although you will use much of the capstone course to finish the prospectus, the faculty ask that you submit a draft of the document as the ticket to entry to the class. You will be asked to do just that in MKTG 461. The reason being is that we cannot offer students incomplete grades anymore.

If you have successfully created a first draft before the three-month time period begins, you are much more likely of finishing the class and earning a passing grade. Those who do not complete the work unfortunately will receive an F, and have to pay to take the course over again. Please think carefully how realistic it is for you to complete all the required work of the capstone project in the short three-month period of each school quarter.

Implementing the Capstone with Initiatives

When the final prospectus has been completed in MKTG 481, students can begin writing the successive documents that highlight the three or four sub disciplines that support the client's problem and your proposed integrated marketing plan. Each of these documents should be about five to eight pages, or 2500 – 4000 words in length. This may seem like a great deal but often ends up hard condensing all your ideas in to that limited page count. You will start by properly justifying the choice of this initiative / campaign. Then you simply recap the basics of the research, the approach, objectives and strategy, and then let the focus of each document be the tactics aligned with that sub discipline and the appropriate measurements for each choice.

Because this is intended to be a real campaign execution on behalf of a client, the creation of the different initiatives will take varying amounts of time. You may have thought out your ideas and can execute them quickly. Some of you may have already executed and now need to write about the experience. But most students will likely find this part frustrating, as they cannot move as fast they would like in executing ideas for a client who may not be ready to cede control or try something new. Part of your job leading this project is planning for such hiccups and managing the situation.

Because you are executing the initiatives in MKTG 483, we do expect to see optimization occur, where you identify what is going right or wrong based on data collected, and then shifting gears to best take advantage of the learnings. Most students will probably not have access to a media budget, but there can certainly be optimization for all promotional marketing efforts. Think about what these might be as you are choosing sub disciplines to include in your project and writing up the findings and next steps for each document.

Getting Ready for Publication

Wrapping up MKTG 483, students will assemble a formal document for submission. All of the various sub discipline sections will be compiled with the prospectus and a number of supplementary

materials, a submission page, a title page, an abstract, a table of contents, and a concluding statement.

The document will begin with a page that is intended to not be counted in your page count, called the submission page. It should be formatted as follows:

Submitted to: Instructor's Name, Bellevue College

Submitted by: Student's Name, Street Address, City, State and Zip Code, Phone, Email

Submission Date: Month, Day, Year

Capstone Project Title

Declaration of Intellectual Property:

This statement acknowledges that I am the sole author of this paper and all elements of the underlying capstone project. Any collaboration or assistance received has been fully documented within the paper, beyond standard citations for external sources used for referencing words and ideas, either quoted directly or paraphrased. I also certify that this document was prepared by me specifically for this course.

Signature

Next is the title page, which should be counted as the first page for your page count. It should be formatted as follows:

Capstone title

Full name

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the Bachelor of Applied Science degree in Digital Marketing

Bellevue College

3000 Landerholm Circle SE

Bellevue, WA 98007

Date of completion

Capstone adviser name

The abstract page should be no longer than 400 words in length and must include the following: title, name of author, Bachelor of Applied Science in Digital Marketing, Bellevue College, 3000 Landerholm Circle SE, Bellevue, WA 98007, year published. The main body of this short page is a statement of the problem or opportunity, what methods were employed to find a solution, and the conclusions stemming from your work. Abstracts are often used by researchers to identify if they should bother reading your authored work. Make their job easy by being clear on what they will find.

The table of contents should ideally reflect headers and sub headers, using APA formatting. There is no need for this to go on more than one page.

The concluding statement should be no longer than 500 words, providing closure after the prospectus and all the initiative sections. The appendices would be placed after the concluding statement section.

Capstone Presentation

Once the capstone paper has been initially approved for submission, the program chair normally arranges a time to assemble an audience of all tenured faculty, the dean, the advisory board, the program manager, interested adjunct faculty, alumni and student peers enrolled in the degree. Candidates for graduation will be assigned a speaking time and asked to present to the audience, all of whom can weigh in and provide feedback to the tenured faculty and dean and advisory board, who jointly agree on which students will be recommended for graduation and which will not at this time. Students are also encouraged to invite their client, friends, family and co-workers that might be interested in seeing their presentation.

Not everyone in the audience will be well versed in marketing terms and concepts, so be careful not to make too many assumptions about what is understood by all. However, this is a complex project, and we would like to hear specific details. The more knowledgeable audience members will be the ones who are assigning a grade!

While a PowerPoint deck is optional, we do expect to see at least some visual materials to accompany the presentation. You can utilize a deck in your speech or connect to a live computing environment if there are materials online that better help illustrate key points of your presentation.

The presentation will last between 8 and 10 minutes, with up to an additional five minutes for questions from the assembled audience. External sources are expected to be shared as part of the presentation to back up your ideas and provide additional credibility. Your delivery is expected to be polished and professional, and is an important consideration in the decision to recommend or not recommend candidates for graduation.

Because COVID-19 has fundamentally changed the way classes are conducted, students will be creating 8 to 10 minute prerecorded video presentations. This will be shared with all parties mentioned above as a link at the completion of spring quarter. There will be no question and answer section following each presentation, but faculty, staff, advisory board members and peers will be allowed to submit questions to the presenters. We are hopeful that we can return to the live presentation environment in the near future.

Portfolio Presentation

The final step a student will take as part of the capstone project is to share a portfolio of key assignments they have worked on over the duration of the bachelor degree program. This will be presented to just the instructor and tenured faculty shortly after the capstone presentations. You will have a chance to think about and practice this presentation in the MKTG 483 class before the final check in with all tenured faculty. You can breathe easy during this presentation, as you will essentially have completed the lengthy capstone process. We just want to make sure you have assembled projects in an attractive and captivating manner so that it may assist you in your job search.

As you can see the capstone project is a large undertaking, and should merit some serious thought on your part before you sign up for the class. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to the program chair or the program manager. We are here to support you and help you make the most of this challenging but rewarding experience.