Mick Healey: Assessing Capstone Projects and Dissertations
CASE EXAMPLES

The set of case studies on Developing and Enhancing Undergraduate Final-Year Projects and Dissertations is available at: http://insight.glos.ac.uk/tli/activities/ntf/creativehops/pages/default.aspx and the updated set of mini case studies at: www.mickhealey.co.uk/resources.

Case Example 1

An alternative format for honours projects (University of Plymouth, UK)

Final-year bioscience students can choose to undertake either a traditional dissertation or a group project including individual analysis and an individual research proposal. The new format encourages more external employer engagement.   Where the students sign up to a group project, the protocol for data collection is largely drafted by the project advisor. Data collection is then carried out by the group and the results are pooled, before being analysed and written up on an individual basis. Subsequently, the students have to draw up a separate research proposal, using the template provided, that is realistic, affordable and achievable by an undergraduate.

Case Example 2

Peer and self assessment in team projects (University of Gloucestershire, UK)

In a final-year capstone module, students work in groups of 4-6 on local environmental issues. They are supported through lectures on environmental philosophies, a workshop on effective teamwork and individual group tutorials on their chosen topics. Assessment is via a group report (60%); oral presentation of project (30%); and an individual learning journal and reflective essay (10%). The marks given for the group project are redistributed among group members using peer and self-assessment of contributions to five group processes (ideas & suggestions; leadership & group organisation; data collection & analysis; report writing; and presenting).

Case Example 3

Alternative final-year projects in the biosciences (University of Leeds, UK)

Final-year biomedical students opt for one of seven types of research project: individual or group laboratory projects, computer simulation projects, critical review projects, survey projects, science & society projects, & educational development projects. Each project runs for 8 weeks, with students expected to commit 3.5 days per week to it. The assessments for all project types are similar. Students write a 25-30-page dissertation and an oral presentation.

Students undertaking critical review projects also have to submit a five-page grant proposal linked to their review and there is a supervisor-allocated 'productivity' mark.

Case Example 4

Working with communities in Africa and the UK on a children's book (University of Central Lancashire, UK)

The Letters to Africa and Pipeline Projects bring students from different disciplines together in a practical way to devise, produce and sell real products for children — usually books, photographs and ebooks, under the banner of UCLan Publishing. Students work with communities and local schools in Lancashire, Zambia and Kenya to gather content for the output. Sales from the products fund the following year's projects and go towards financial support for secondary school pupils in Kenya.   Each participating degree programmes takes a different approach to assessing the specific contributions of its enrolled students.

Case Example 5

Nurturing biochemical research skills in student teams (Queensland University of Technology, Australia)

This final-year project combines group-work, laboratory skills and practical assessment to provide students with an authentic learning experience that integrates a number of specialist biochemical procedures. Students work in teams of six to complete a 13-week laboratory-based project to attempt to purify an enzyme. Workshop sessions foster critical analysis of scientific procedures and provide insights into successful group work. Students improve oral and written communication skills through individual presentations, group submissions and as contributors to online discussions.

Case Example 6

Virtual learning in diverse law graduate workplaces (Queensland University of Technology, Australia)

Virtual law placement is an opportunity to research into the diverse range of working environments now available to law graduates, including international placements. Students are assessed through their submission of an

application for their preferred placement, their contribution to an online discussion forum, the project and an ePortfolio reflection. Using online communication technologies, they work as part of a team on a real-world law workplace project: for example, an internet-based intellectual property dispute; or listing a public company; or engaging in research about access to justice for juvenile offenders in regions of Thailand.

Case Example 7

Learning from industry professionals
(Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts, UK)

Contemporary Issues in Arts Management is a final-year module where students engage with industry professionals. Students research areas of interest and present their findings at a student conference. Over the course of the module, ten industry professionals talk about the future of the industry. Students are required to network with speakers, host the sessions, and provide research packs to peers. Most of the assessment (80%) is via a presentation at an annual conference attended by industry professionals and members of the public as well as the Institute's other two years of management students. Emphasis is placed on coherence and strength of argument and supporting evidence. The criteria for the remaining 20% are decided by students.

Case Example 8

A charity fund-raising project to enhance employability
(University of Bradford, UK)

This final-year team project engages business and management students in raising money for charities. Assessment is through a formal presentation undertaken in front of three employers as well as tutors and team documentation (minutes of meetings, accounts, receipt from the charity involved, evidence of communication with the charity, risk assessment of health and safety for the activities proposed, feedback from the mentor and a two-side reflective account) submitted one week before the presentation. Assessment criteria include presentation skills as well as students' performance as a team and their performance on the task.