

*Capstone Research in
European Studies
Student Handbook*

Course code: EUS 375

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1. Introduction: What is a Capstone study ?

The Capstone study is an in-depth academic study (20 pages in length) that allows you to consolidate and extend the intellectual work you have completed during your European Studies Major. It offers an opportunity to explore a particular issue in much greater depth than is feasible in a class or seminar paper, and to argue your own perspective on that issue.

Like any piece of academic writing, your study needs to be *motivated*. It should be more than a synthesis of work already done on a particular topic; from your reading, you need to “create a research space” (Swales, 1990) that justifies the particular inquiry that you undertake.

This means that you are expected to:

- a) look *critically* at how other thinkers have defined the issue/problem
- b) decide from your critical assessment of their attempts how *you* can best define the issue/ problem you are looking at
- c) evaluate the evidence that other researchers may have already presented on the issue/problem to see whether a convincing analysis/answer has already been found.

You then need to:

- d) define the further questions that need to be addressed and decide which of these questions you can *feasibly* address in a small-scale study
- e) define how you can gather “data” (or undertake some kind of inquiry) that will allow you to address those questions, again bearing in mind your limitations (time, access). You will need to justify your approach as the most appropriate one in the circumstances
- f) define how you are going to analyse your material/data in order to be able to address your research questions, and justify this approach to analysis
- g) draw from your analysis the significant conclusions in answer to your research questions and relate your discussion of these back to your original “problem” or “question” (steps a to c above)
- h) discuss the limitations of your study in order to define its validity and use your discussion of limitations to explore your original approach to the “problem” further (e.g. specifying further research which could be undertaken)
- i) (optionally) use the conclusions of your study to specify some kind of “output”, e.g. policy recommendations.

The key to a satisfactory study or research project is the logical progression from introduction to conclusion; from research questions through to investigation to conclusions which address the research questions in some significant way. That logic needs to be made clear to your readers.

While you cannot undertake sustained empirical research at this stage, you should undertake some form of original analysis which enables you to explore the question *you* identify in a way you judge to be appropriate. The study, then, is an opportunity, for you to make *your* contribution to European Studies. It requires commitment, self-discipline, stamina and long hours spent in the library - but it’s also a challenging, stimulating and satisfying project!

2. Defining and maintaining your focus

Your initial definition of a topic is likely to be very wide, say “immigration and politics in Europe”, and much of your early work will probably be directed to narrowing down your focus to make sure you can produce a useful piece of work. It is easy to underestimate the amount of work required to investigate a particular issue effectively and how quickly a semester can go; it is also easy to lose sight of the aim of your project in the midst of mountains of literature. Early planning helps avoid these pitfalls.

As you work on any academic paper, particularly a sustained piece of work like a research project, it usually helps then to identify *questions* to guide your studying and drafting. Questions provide you with a purpose ... to try to answer the question! In the process, you are likely to come across a lot more questions, but they will help to focus your work on an argument.

Study Help #1

Keep a research log. You can help keep your research on track by monitoring the development of your thinking. Ask yourself: What question am I trying to investigate? How effectively have I answered it so far? Why am I studying this particular book or article? Force yourself to note down answers to these questions, even if you feel what you have to say is somewhat superficial.

3. Faculty supervisor

On the basis of your initial idea, you will identify an advisor, or “supervisor” (from the list of affiliated CES faculty) who has some knowledge of the area you wish to work in. Bear in mind that your supervisor will not necessarily be an expert on the *specific* question you wish to investigate ... that expert in fact will be you. Students should make contact with their potential supervisor during the *previous* semester. This will *typically* mean making contact with a CES faculty member during the Fall term.

Supervisors should give students some guidance before the Fall semester ends as to preliminary reading and research that needs to be undertaken during the Winter break. The purpose of starting work on the Capstone project before the Spring semester is to read and study so as to arrive in the Spring semester with a more focused idea and/or area for investigation. It is crucial for students to use the Winter break productively, even if that simply means eliminating certain areas of investigation.

It is *very important* that you keep in touch with your supervisor. The way in which the supervision is carried out is left to negotiation between you and your supervisor. However, it is strongly recommended that you have at least 5 meetings over the course of the semester. Supervisors typically discuss issues such as the scope of the title, the academic suitability of your project, methodologies and resources to use, sources of information or assistance. In addition they may comment on preliminary plans and drafts. So, if you encounter problems or are unsure about the way ahead, talk things over with your supervisor.

In the end, however, you are the person who knows most about your project and thus the only person who can assume responsibility for what it contains. Your supervisor cannot offer any supervision which might be interpreted as substantially contributing to the project itself. For example, you should not expect your supervisor to revise a final draft of your study. Nor can she or he tell you in advance whether your draft dissertation will definitely pass or not.

Use your supervisor wisely. As far as possible, prepare for meetings by identifying beforehand what it is that you wish to discuss or feel you need help with. If you are asking your supervisor to give her or his opinion on your progress, please give her or him enough time (preferably at least a week) to read your work.

4. Using other resources ... your peers, e-mail, the Internet

There are likely to be moments in researching and writing when you get stuck or demoralized. By all means, arrange to see your supervisor, but you might find that organizing a support group with your peers to discuss your ideas and problems might work well. This is particularly true where a number of you are working on similar areas. Reading and discussing ideas together is NOT unfair collaboration: quite the contrary!

You might also find that a discussion list provides a useful forum for you to check your ideas and get a wide range of reactions to your arguments by using the e-mail list or posting drafts on the course web site for EUS 375 on Blackboard for example.

Study Help # 2

Never copy anything from another source without referencing that source. Never quote or paraphrase very large chunks without interpreting or discussing them. Plagiarism is never worth it. It could cost you your degree.

5. Research prior to writing

Reading widely and tracking down the relevant literature is only the first step towards writing a good project. As a very rough guideline, you are likely to consult at least 30 books and articles in the course of your research. You are *expected* to have reviewed the relevant articles in the *current* journals and to have conducted a bibliographical search from either print-based and/or electronic abstracting data-bases. You should not rely on your supervisor to point you to the relevant recent literature on your question.

You are probably best advised to get down to doing this work as soon as you can and certainly well before the start of the Spring semester. Even though we have great library resources at UT Austin that cover most areas of interest for European Studies students, some key texts may not be immediately available on campus, thus you will probably need to request a number of texts/books and journal articles from interlibrary loans. Do this early on since it takes time.

During note taking, do take care to note down the detailed references of your sources (usual convention: Author/Date of publication/page number with the full title and publisher appearing in your bibliography). This will help when it comes to citing references in your text and drawing up your bibliography. It will also help you to avoid the risk of unacknowledged citation; *please remember that plagiarism carries very serious penalties.*

6. Drafting

As you get more and more familiar with your topic, you will start to formulate your own assessments of the evidence currently available and develop your own arguments. A mere reporting of other scholars' theories obviously does not make a good research paper, however well organized. A Capstone study must have an argument, that is, a logical progression from a question to a (tentative) answer.

Your aim, then, is *evaluate ideas and evidence, raise new questions, examine these questions systematically and coherently, and draw out well justified conclusions* on the basis of what you have found. You are *not* required to put forward a revolutionary new theory on, say, European nationalism or provide *conclusive* evidence to support a particular position. Nevertheless, you are expected to a) undertake a carefully considered inquiry using appropriate research tools which will allow you to draw some non-trivial conclusions, and b) indicate the limitations of your inquiry and, where appropriate, how other scholars might research your question more fully than you have been able to.

7. Revising and proof-reading

A Capstone study should have a tight, coherent structure, show in-depth knowledge of the topic and develop logical arguments leading to careful conclusions. You must also follow referencing conventions rigorously. These are set out below. You should be meticulous about clarity of expression and spelling, as well as the presentation of any data.

Most of us are not good at proof-reading our own work: why not get somebody else to help you proof-read your final version for you?

Study Help # 3

Don't let stress build up. A research-based study can be a high-stress endeavor. Don't become a victim of it. If you need to talk with someone, make an appointment with an advisor, or if necessary, visit the Health Center for help. Your physical and mental health comes first. Don't take on too many responsibilities the semester you write your Capstone study.

8. Guidelines for the use of references

It's a good idea to keep a computer database or an index card system as you read (ENDNOTE is a useful software package that helps you to do this), and to record all the required information for each reference straight away (and also where you got the reference, e.g. "PCL library ref: HG314.65", "book borrowed from friend" etc.) so that when you come to the writing task all the information you need is at hand and you don't waste time going back to find books again.

Referencing is essential

- to show that you have researched your material and that the ideas you present have been considered in the light of documented material on the subject,
- to substantiate the knowledge, theories and discussions that you present in your papers,
- to differentiate between your own opinions and the views of those who have greater knowledge and wider experience of the given subject,
- to allow those who are interested to go back to the sources you have cited for further information.

You may refer to literature in order to:

- give factual information,
- illustrate a point,
- present a theoretical perspective,
- present an argument or counter argument,
- support an argument or counter argument of your own.

It is essential that you acknowledge the sources of your information, ideas and arguments.

There are a variety of accepted scholarly systems for referencing your sources. These include the Chicago Manual of Style, the Modern Language Association (MLA), and the American Psychological Association (APA). Make sure you are consistent in your use of the referencing system and that your Capstone supervisor approves it. You can find detailed descriptions of each style system in these works:

- *Chicago Manual of Style*. 15th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 6th ed. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2003.
- *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 5th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001.

For more information on the steps of researching and writing your paper, consult one or more of these books:

- Hairston, Maxine, Ruzskeiwicz, John J. and Friend, Christy. *The Scott Foresman Handbook for Writers*. 7th ed. New York: HarperCollins, 2004.

- Strunk, William Jr. and White, E.B. *The Elements of Style*. 3rd ed. New York: Macmillan, 2000.
- Trimble, John R. *Writing with Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing*. 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000.
- Williams, Joseph M., *Style: Towards Clarity and Grace*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Cook, Claire Kehrwald, *Line by Line: How to Improve Your Own Writing*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985.
- Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 6th ed. Rev. by John Grossman and Alice Bennett. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

We also strongly encourage you to visit the Undergraduate Writing Center for further advice and guidance: <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/uwc/>

Study Help # 4

Exercise, eat right, and rest. Sounds simple enough, but it is very common for students to forget to do these things while in the throes of a major study. Plan to include some sort of physical activity in your day. Many of the greatest thinkers were also avid walkers. A walk is sometimes the best way to break writer's block or to stave off a bout of anxiety.

9. Assessment: Hand-in date, presentation details and descriptors for grading

Your study must be handed in on the Monday two weeks before the final teaching day of class, i.e. Monday of Week 13, to the CES office located at Mezes Hall 3.126. The following week, i.e. in Week 14, you will give a 15 minute presentation based on your study and be prepared to answer questions on it (for about 5 minutes). This will form part of your final grade.

Faculty who have served as thesis supervisors are expected to attend the presentation in order to question the student after the talk. We hope the faculty supervisor will open the student's Q&A by asking a challenging question that allows the student to *defend* their argument. More exploratory questions will follow from the general audience. It is also extremely helpful if faculty can attend the entire presentation session to help question other European Studies students. Students are required to attend the full session in which they present. The precise length of the entire presentations will depend on the number of Capstone Study projects being presented.

Visual Presentations: if students wish to show video or use PowerPoint, these presentations must be carefully timed and rehearsed. Students may speak for no more than their allotted time (15 minutes) and will then be expected to answer questions for up to 5 minutes. No more than 4-5 minutes of video should be used. Paper handouts circulated before the entire session begins are also a good idea.

Video and PowerPoint presentations must be loaded on the console computer in advance of the session in which a student presents. These presentations should be "road tested" for readiness.

Your study will be graded first by your supervisor. A “second reader” from within the CES affiliated faculty will then read it and assess the grade and comments made by your supervisor. By the middle of the Spring term (or whenever the Capstone study is being completed), students will need to consult with supervisors as to appropriate second readers, which must be secured by Week 6.

No grade can be confirmed until after your formal presentation on one of the dead days before finals. Broad descriptors for grading are given below.

Grade A

A Capstone project awarded an “A” grade should:

- provide an independent perspective on knowledge and understanding.
- demonstrate in-depth and balanced discussion of the question addressed (this should be reflected in the bibliography).
- be consistent in argumentation and analysis, with all stages in the argument supported by carefully evaluated academic evidence.
- demonstrate a critical stance in relation to knowledge and understanding; in particular, the limitations of claims should be recognized, and there should be evidence that alternative views and approaches have been critically evaluated.
- show clearly how conclusions are reached; in particular there should be evidence of the route of the academic journey, with significant waymarks identified.
- demonstrate that the inquiry itself has been conducted rationally and systematically *throughout*.
- there should be an absolute minimum of technical errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and referencing.

Grade B

- A question/questions for investigation is/are clearly stated and supported by a rationale.
- The exposition may be orthodox and derived from established academic sources, but a representative coverage of the literature will be provided (this should be reflected in the bibliography).
- The argumentation may lack detail but will provide a coherent basis for addressing the questions for inquiry and will lead to investigation using broadly appropriate methods.
- There should be evidence that research methods have been selected taking into consideration issues of reliability, validity and ethics.
- Despite some digressions and irrelevancies, the inquiry will shed some light on the questions addressed and discussion of findings should link back to the theoretical rationale.
- The limitations of the inquiry will be addressed, leading to specifications for further research and/or development. The study should thus demonstrate some understanding of how to undertake independent investigation.
- There may be some technical weaknesses, e.g. errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and referencing, but these should not significantly impede the reader.

Grade C

- A question/questions for investigation is/are stated and largely relate to the rationale.
- The exposition is orthodox and mainly derived from established academic sources. The coverage of the literature is adequate but some key texts are missing.
- The argumentation lacks sufficient detail but there is a basis for addressing the questions for inquiry and the methods used are broadly appropriate.
- There is little evidence of an awareness of methodological issues concerning reliability, validity and ethics.
- Despite digressions and irrelevancies, the inquiry will shed some light on the questions addressed and discussion of findings should link back to the theoretical rationale.
- The limitations of the inquiry are only partially addressed. The study should thus demonstrate some understanding of how to undertake independent investigation.
- There are a number of weaknesses, e.g. technical errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and referencing, but these should not significantly impede the reader.

Grade D

- The study may succeed in identifying the issues implied by the title, but will not explore them in any depth.
- The structure will be adequate to outline an argument, but there are likely to be fairly major discrepancies, digressions and irrelevancies in investigating the issues at stake; in particular, a coherent progression from the rationale to the research questions to the investigation and the conclusions is likely to be absent.
- Important sections of work may be missing or very limited (e.g. literature review, inquiry, discussion, conclusions).
- A critical perspective on the knowledge and ideas presented will be lacking.
- The level of debate is likely to be superficial and predictable, with little evidence of intellectual engagement with the question chosen.
- Much of the discussion is likely to be derivative, typically based on general textbooks.

Grade F

- The study neither succeeds in identifying the issues implied by the title, nor will it explore them in any depth.
- The structure is inadequate to outline an argument, and there are major discrepancies, digressions and irrelevancies in investigating the issues at stake; in particular, a coherent progression from the rationale to the research questions to the investigation and the conclusions is likely to be absent.
- Important sections of work may be missing entirely (e.g. literature review, inquiry, discussion, conclusions).
- A critical perspective on the knowledge and ideas presented will be lacking.
- The level of debate is likely to be superficial and predictable, with little evidence of intellectual engagement with the question chosen.
- Much of the discussion is likely to be derivative, typically based on anecdotes and non-academic sources.

10. How should the Capstone study be organized?

Most studies will be organized in the following way:

1. A title page
2. Abstract
3. A contents page
4. Introduction
5. The body: 3-4 subheadings or sections
6. Conclusions and recommendations
7. Bibliography
8. Appendices (optional)

1 *Title Page*

Your title page should give the title of your study, your name, the words “Center for European Studies: Capstone Project”, the submission date, and the name of the Professor who has supervised your work.

2 *Abstract*

Your study is a contribution to thinking in your chosen field. For these purposes, a brief summary of your study is required (250 words max) which will allow other researchers to get an idea of your approach and your conclusions. The usual structure for an abstract is given below:

Aim

What the dissertation sets out to do

Background

The context and rationale for the dissertation

Procedure

How the study is organised; what it covers

Method

The approach or methodology used in the study

Findings

The key findings of the study

Conclusions

The principle conclusions or recommendations

3 *Contents Page*

Your contents page provides your reader with a quick guide to what is in your study, and to how it is organized. It should contain the title of each of your

sections or subheadings, along with appropriate page numbers. You should also present a list of figures, tables and appendices.

4 Introduction

Your Introduction is where you set out in detail what you intend to do in the rest of the study. It is also where you discuss your reasons for undertaking this particular inquiry. So, the Introduction defines the study. For that reason it is sometimes the last thing you write; it needs to be written based on the knowledge of what you have discovered in your inquiry.

It needs to contain:

- a) a description of *what* you are going to do
- b) a justification and description of your methods - i.e. *how* you intend to proceed
- b) a discussion of *why* it is important

5 Subheadings and Sections

The subheadings or sections of your study are where you actually demonstrate what you have done in your inquiry and your findings. How you organize them is up to you.

Try to keep your overall title constantly in mind when you are starting and finishing a section. You need to help your reader see the relevance of each section to your overall question, summarized in your title.

6 Conclusion

Your conclusion is where you draw together the results of your inquiry. What you have discovered in the process? And why are your discoveries significant?

Try not to use your conclusion just as a space in which you repeat what you have already said; talk about the results, but also think about discussing their wider implications.

7 Bibliography

All references cited in the body of your text *must* relate back to your bibliography. Please check this before you hand in your study.

8 Presentation

A high level of care in presentation is essential.

- a) Your study must be word-processed or typed on 8.5" x 11" paper, and on one side of the page only.
- b) Your study must be double spaced throughout, except for quotations longer than two lines, which should be indented and single-spaced. Appendices and the bibliography should be single-spaced within entries, and 1.5 or double-spaced between entries. You should use 12 point standard font, e.g. Times or Arial
- c) Pages must be numbered in the lower center.
- d) You should have margins of at least 1 inch all round your text.

- e) Most references should appear within the text, not in footnotes. If you feel footnotes with additional comments are necessary, then these should appear at the bottom of your page and kept to a minimum.
- f) Citations *must* be accurate. A bibliographical reference *must* be provided for all citations.
- g) Accuracy in your use of English is assumed, as is correct spelling. Please use a spell-checker and proof-read your work rigorously.
- h) Please ensure clear presentation of any tables, figures or diagrams.
- i) Finally, you *must*:
 - avoid language use that might be found to be deliberately offensive,
 - ensure confidentiality where appropriate when referring to informants or subjects of your research,
 - acknowledge any sources or other assistance meticulously.

You will need to submit **two copies** of the Capstone project to CES.

11. Capstone Deadlines and Timeline (EUS 375)

Semester before	Student should be reading and taking notes for her or his Capstone topic; make initial contact with potential supervisor.
Week 15	Registration forms for Spring 2008 EUS 375 are due to Mezes Hall 3.126. Students must have a 1-2 paragraph narrowed study topic and bibliography and must have the name of a supervisor.
Semester Break	Begin research, reading and writing.
First day of semester	Student begins EUS 375.
All semester	The student is responsible for working independently and for meeting regularly with her or his supervisor. Week 1, students should review their proposal with their supervisor and set a schedule of deadlines (see below for an example).
Week 5	Finish bulk of initial research and reading.
Week 6	Confirm name of the second reader.
Week 7	Turn in a detailed outline of study and a draft of the introduction.
Week 11	Turn in a complete first draft to your supervisor.
Week 13	Turn in fully revised drafts to both readers.
Week 15	Two copies of the Capstone study are turned into Mezes Hall 3.126. <u>No exceptions will be granted at the last minute.</u>
Finals week (Monday)	European Studies Capstone Colloquium. Attendance is required. Students present their research and conclusions to other European Studies students, CES faculty, and friends.

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