

The TRU Adventure Capstone

Introduction

The woodstove crackles and the light from the flames dances across the student's face as she introduces the first question for the group to address. *"How has education got in the way of your learning?"*

This is not your typical university capstone experience. The Adventure Capstone is the final culminating undergraduate level course and exit point for adventure students in the Bachelor of Tourism Management. It is also available to graduating Adventure students in the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies. This course is a unique progression point for adventure students about to leave the security of the university environment and head out into the unknown. For a typical student this may be the culmination of 17 years of schooling and a terrifying step into a new world. To borrow from Kurt Hahn, they are outward bound.

What is a capstone?

There are two typical formats for Post-secondary capstone courses. One is a summary project that demands a demonstration of the collective skills and abilities developed over the duration of the degree. The other is more reflective in nature. It is this second model that was selected for the TRU Adventure Capstone.

Boyer (2004) describes the scholarship of integration as the gathering of isolated concepts to create meaning by generating perspective. A capstone course integrates the many diverse facets of the undergraduate degree into a cohesive meaningful entity. By organizing and making sense of the diverse parts, the student is able to move forward into a post-university work environment (Durel, 1993).

The capstone course investigates contemporary adventure and sport issues with a look to preparing students as future leaders in adventure oriented business and community development. Topics for discussion include ongoing personal and professional development, navigating through current industry trends, graduate school expectations, and vocational issues. Students formulate a personal written philosophy articulating their vision and mission as professionals in the field of adventure. They address three elements:

1. Competency-based reflective evaluation of skills

- Where have I been?
- Who has influenced me?
- What have I learned?
- What do I do well/poorly?

2. Personal equity

What is my reputation?

How can I improve my reputation?

Who am I valuable to?

How can I become more valuable?

3. Personal and professional goals

Where am I going?

What have I learned that will help me get there?

How will I get there?

What am I missing?

Who do I still need to learn from?

The setting

Most of the students have spent four or more years in university classrooms. The intent of the Adventure Capstone course is to facilitate the students' transition from the four walls of the university to the greater landscape of the Adventure industry. As such, the bulk of the course is conducted in a remote mountain cabin. There is no wifi, no cell coverage, no TV, just the undivided attention of a group of likeminded peers. In this setting, students discuss relevant, important issues that they face as emerging professionals in the adventure industry.

Discussion questions are formed based on three themes: the past, the present and the future.

The Past:

Personal Reflection

Can you identify the highest high and lowest low you ever felt during your post-secondary years?

Where and when are you the happiest version of yourself?

How has stress benefited or faltered your performance, attitude and moral in either school or work?

Are you comfortable with your personality? Who you are when no one is looking?

The Present:

Education

Choose three words to sum up your TRU experience. (Does it surprise you compared to what you anticipated?)

What do you think is your most valuable attribute that has been developed during your time at TRU?

How has learning inside and outside affected your educational experience? Theoretical or practical? Which was more useful for job/career opportunities and why?

How has education got in the way of your learning?

Industry

How did your personality steer you into this industry?

What attributes do you look for in employers/ co-workers that align to your "style"?

Do you find it fair that clients have gained the power to change the way we run our trips? (Ex. Mount. Everest guiding trips)

Do you find that guiding companies still prefer to hire men over women?

The personal relationships you have developed at TRU could be very beneficial to your future in the industry. How do you plan on keeping these relationships strong?

How is the progressive movement of drug legalization have a positive or negative impact on the adventure industry? Personally?

What skills do you possess that you would still use to promote yourself if you were applying for a job in a different field?

What are your plans for dealing with the seasonality of the adventure industry?

The Future:

Setting Goals

What are your top three personal development goals for next year?

What is part of you that is holding you back from fulfilling your goals? (injuries, medical conditions, attitude)

Dreams & Aspirations

If you had nothing holding you back, no obstacles to overcome, if money wasn't a factor, what would you do?

What would you do in life if you did not need to work for money?

Compared to the beginning of your education, would say that you are moving forward because of the future or moving forward because of your past? Are there liabilities with this?

Do you think you will use your education in outdoor adventure and tourism as a lifelong career choice? Do you have other career aspirations?

The exit point

The final element of the capstone transition is the delivery of a five-minute "elevator pitch" to a hypothetical employer or business contact. Each student selects a person or position in the industry that they would like make their pitch to.

Summary

The words of one of the students

My time at TRU has been much more transforming than I had anticipated. It has allowed me to understand myself and my aspirations a little better, but it wasn't until our weekend at the Monashee Hut that these realizations became obvious. Implementing the ADVG Capstone as a 'create your own' culminating course has to have been the greatest possible way to complete my time at TRU. The combination of a beautiful remote setting, physical challenges during the day, and mental challenges in the evening made for the most effective learning environment for a group of peers like us. The opportunity to openly express my thoughts and ask questions to a group of respected peers to receive honest feedback and advice was an experience that was priceless to me. The lessons that I learned and the relationships that formed from that weekend will last a life time.