

Regarding Graduation Products

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(1) Q & A about graduation products and registration

In the ST program, students are required to write a graduation product in and complete (i.e., to earn credits from) either the Graduation Project or the Capstone course.

(1) Submit a Graduation Thesis or an Activity Report as the graduation product in the 8th semester. This is completed within a seminar, beginning with Research Seminar (2 credits) in the 7th semester and finalized in Graduation Project (4 credits) in the 8th semester.

(2) Submit a Capstone Report in the Capstone course (2 credits), taken in either the 7th or 8th semester.

Note: The diagram on the website shows it under the 7th semester, but it can be taken in either the 7th or 8th semester.

<https://en.apu.ac.jp/academic/st/seminar/>

Q: What are the differences between seminar-based products and capstone products?

(Also see the comparison table at the end.)

- The Capstone product is an individually written report, just like the Graduation Thesis or Activity Report completed in a seminar.
- While the Thesis or Activity Report topics are typically chosen freely by each student (or sometimes guided by the seminar instructor), the research questions for the Capstone Report are pre-determined. Students select from several options provided in advance.
- Because of the difference of credits, the Capstone Report requires less words.
- The Graduation Thesis is more academic, while the Activity Report is more practical. However, the distinction is not always clear-cut, so students should follow the guidance of their seminar instructor.

Q: How does course registration differ between seminars and the capstone course?

- For seminars, students apply for their preferred seminar in advance, and the university will register it for them.

(Unless a student changes seminars, they will automatically be registered for the same seminar in each succeeding semester.)

*Note: If a student receives an F in the Research Seminar course in their 7th semester, the student will not be registered to Graduation Project in their 8th semester.

- For Capstone, students must register for it themselves during the official course registration period in either their 7th or 8th semester.

Q: Can I take both a seminar and Capstone at the same time?

- It is technically possible to register for both; however, since both require significant time to complete a graduation product, taking both simultaneously is not recommended to avoid the risk of being unable to complete either successfully.

Q: Can I take the Research Seminar course if I didn't earn credits from the Major Seminar courses in my 3rd year?

- Yes. Those who didn't earn credits from a Major Seminar course will be automatically registered for Research Seminar in their 7th semester.

Q: I completed the Research Seminar course in my 7th semester. In my 8th semester, can I choose not to take the Graduation Project course and take only the Capstone course?

- Yes, this is possible. However, students who have earned credits for Research Seminar in their 7th semester will be automatically registered for the Graduation Project course in their 8th semester. If you do not wish to take the Graduation Project course, please delete the registration yourself.

Comparative Table of Thesis, Activity Report, and Capstone

Graduation Product	Graduation Thesis	Activity Report	Capstone Report
Registered Course	Graduation Project (4 th year seminar)		Capstone
Research Questions	Based on gaps in existing research	Based on inconsistencies or gaps between practices/challenges in the field and related prior research	Based on the specified topic and a limited selection of prior research
Analysis	Rigorous analysis of the collected data by using prior academic research	Analysis from the perspective of both practical prior research and practices/issues in the field	Analysis of issues by using a limited selection of prior research and conducting simple data collection
Solutions	Practical implications based on new academic insights derived from this study	More appropriate solutions based on practices/issues in the field and practical prior research	Reasonably effective solutions based on a limited selection of prior research and limited data collection

Required characteristics	Rigor (reliability and validity)	Relevance (how much the research findings contribute to improving the quality of practice)	Understanding how to write a paper through a simulated experience
No. characters/ words (per person)	15,000 Japanese characters or 6,500 English words	15,000 Japanese characters or 6,500 English words	8,000 Japanese characters or 3,500 English words

(2) Capstone Guidelines

● About Graduation Products and Course Registration

In the ST program, students are required to complete (i.e., to earn credits of) Graduation Project or Capstone and write one of the following two types of graduation products in order to graduate:

- (1) Graduation Thesis or Activity Report: written in seminar classes, i.e., Research Seminar in the 7th semester and completed in the Graduation Project during the 8th semester.
- (2) Capstone Report: A report written and submitted in the Capstone course during either the 7th or 8th semester.

Note: The diagram on the website shows it under the 7th semester, but it can be taken in either the 7th or 8th semester. <https://en.apu.ac.jp/academic/st/seminar/>

● Requirements for the Capstone Report

- The Capstone Report, like the Graduation Thesis or Activity Report completed in a seminar, is an individually produced work by each student. However, while students are free to select the theme of their Graduation Thesis or Activity Report on their own (or follow the guidance of their seminar instructor), the research questions to be addressed in a Capstone Report will be determined by the course instructor.
- The length of the Capstone Report must generally be more than 8,000 characters in Japanese or 3,500 words in English. Since quality is paramount, the method of counting figures and tables, as well as the decision of pass/fail even if the word count standard is not met, is left to the discretion of each instructor. (Graduation Reports and Activity Reports are expected to be more than 15,000 characters in Japanese or 6,500 words in English)
- From the perspective of required word count and credits, the Capstone Report can be regarded as a shorter version of a Graduation Thesis/Activity Report.

● Notes on Course Registration

- While seminar courses are registered by the university based on a prior application (if a student does not change or cancel their seminar when advancing from their third to fourth year, they will automatically be enrolled in Research Seminar under the same professor), the capstone course must be manually registered by the student themselves during the course registration period in either the 7th or 8th semester. Therefore, it is recommended that students consult with their

seminar advisor in advance to decide whether to continue with their seminar or take the Capstone course instead.

- Although it is possible to register for both seminar and Capstone courses simultaneously, doing so is not recommended as producing each graduation requirement demands a significant amount of time and effort and risks students failing to complete one.

- **Course Description**

In Capstone, students conduct research on actual issues provided by organizations such as companies and local governments under the guidance of teachers, as well as on issues that teachers set after considering those organizations. Students are expected to propose independent solutions by making use of the knowledge, techniques, and social activity experiences that they have accumulated.

This course is the final course of research training which is offered systematically: Introduction to Research Methods in the first year, Critical Reading I and Critical Reading II in the second year, Major Seminar in the third year, Research Seminar and Graduation Project or Capstone in the fourth year. By taking these courses, students are expected to be able to conduct in-depth research and analyses of their research topics based on academic concepts and theories as well as acquire the ability to effectively express their views orally and in writing.

- **Elements of the Capstone Report**

- Title

Example: The Influence of Instagram on Young People's Travel Decision-Making: A Case Study of City X

- Research Question (Express the Title as a Question)

Example: How does Instagram influence young people's travel decision-making?

- Definition of Key Terms

Clarify and define the key terms included in the research question.

Example: Established theories of travel decision-making, characteristics of young people, features of Instagram, about X City.

- Review and Critique of Previous Studies

Review at least five prior studies, identify their limitations, and discuss the relevance of those limitations to your own research question.

Use J-STAGE and Web of Science for prior studies.

Copies of the reviewed papers must be submitted.

Recognize that research questions derived solely from these reviews may be formal or superficial; acknowledge this limitation and discuss it in the "Conclusion" section.

- Methodology of Data Collection and Analysis

Describe concrete and feasible methods for collecting and analyzing data.

Example: Extract 200 image posts (per tag) related to Usuki from 2022–2025 and conduct interviews with young participants (e.g., APU students).

- Results, Discussion, and Findings

Analyze the collected data and present your findings, interpret and explain results to the research question based on evidence.

Include at least one table and one figure.

Example: Use charts and tables to substantiate your findings or answer on how Instagram influences young people's travel decision-making.

- Recommendations Derived from the Findings or Answers
- Conclusion (Significance, Limitations, and Future Work)
- References

Several evaluation elements are omitted above. Detailed formatting requirements will be specified during the Capstone classes.

- For all other information, please refer to the syllabus.

Following pages are

(3) Activity Report Outlines and Examples

Activity Report/Outline

Title

Chapter 1 (Approx. 400 words)

- Activity Background
 - Present your concerns relevant to the activities you did, or the issues/challenges you encountered while doing the activities
- Review of Previous Research on the Issue
 - Identify consistencies and gaps/misalignment between practices/challenges in the field and prior research
- Research Question(s)
- Methodology
 - Through the depiction and analysis of practices in the field
- Presentation of the Report's Significance
 - Application to your own practice
 - Feedback for practice in the field

Chapter 2 (Approx. 900 words)

- Review of Previous Research on the Issue
 - There is no need to be very comprehensive; instead, gather a small number of materials and prior research that connect to practical challenges (articles for practitioners, practical reports, practical research studies, case reports, materials on existing systems).
 - Practical Journals (e.g. Development in Practice, Practice: Social Work in Action)

Chapter 3 (Approx. 3,400 characters)

- Depiction of Practice(s) in the Field
 - Extract relevant elements from the field and construct them as a case study.
 - Data Sources (You do not need to use all of the following, but using multiple is recommended)
 - Your own personal experience
 - Secondary materials from the field
 - Primary sources; data obtained as part of a group work is acceptable
 - Materials from planning/implementing previous projects; group work deliverables may also be used

Chapter 4 (Approx. 1,300 words)

- Analyze field practices with reference to prior research

Chapter 5 (Approx. 400 words)

-Conclusions

- Based on the research question
- Significance: Emphasis on application to your own practice and practices/issues in the field
- Limitations and Further Research

Optional additions

- PPT
- Media and other deliverables: videos, vlogs, manuals, etc.

Notes:

- Focus on appropriateness (how well research findings contribute to improving the quality of practice) rather than rigor (reliability and validity)
- This is an individual student project. As a guideline, it should be at least 15,000 Japanese characters or 6,500 English words. Quality is paramount; therefore, even if the word count guideline is not met, the pass/fail decision rests with each instructor's judgment.
(A thesis should be at least 15,000 Japanese characters or 6,500 English words; Capstone should be at least 8,000 Japanese characters or 3,500 English words)
- Examples of fields of reports: Field Study, Practicum, internships (e.g., Junglia), seminar projects (e.g. refugee support, refugee photo exhibitions, commissioned research/projects for local governments or chambers of commerce), community activities (e.g., food banks, volunteering in special support classes for children with foreign roots, Regional Revitalization Corps Internships), entrepreneurial experience, circles/clubs/other initiatives with social impacts or alignment with the ST curriculum.

Activity Report Example 1

Example Activity: ABC Store

(A student circle that collects food that would otherwise go to waste and distributes it free of charge to citizens)

Research Question Examples:

- Can ABC Store be positioned as a food bank?
- How does the voluntary student organization ABC Store ensure the continuity of its activities?
- How do the activities of ABC Store impact food loss reduction and community welfare improvement in Beppu City?
- How do the activities of ABC Store differ from the conventional food bank model, and how does it present a new approach to community-based food support?

- **Research Questions:** Can ABC Store be positioned as a food bank?

Title: Can Student-Led Food Redistribution Activities Be Considered Food Banks? An Analysis of Practices at ABC Store

Chapter 1: Introduction

Research background, Research question, Research objectives, Methodology, and Report's outline

Chapter 2: Theoretical Background and Existing Research

Definition of food banks, related concepts, current status in Japan and worldwide, typology
Evaluation criteria (defining the conditions for considering something a food bank)

Chapter 3: Summary of ABC Store

Chapter 4: Details of Activities and the Operation Process

Chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion

Comparative analysis with the definition of food banks

- Evaluation using evaluation criteria
- Comparison with other food bank cases

Answer to the research question → It cannot yet be called a food bank; we concluded that it is a “food sharing organization in the pre-food bank stage.”

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Summary of the study, Answer to the research question, Significance, limitations,
Further research

References

Additions

Collected data
Chart showing distribution volume
List of cooperating organizations

Activity Report Example 2

Example Activity: Long-term internship at an integrated elementary-middle school in Toho Village

Research Questions:

- How did the various activities (visits to APU, International Exchange Day, Children's English Guides, and APU Field Study) at Touhou Gakuen across English education, cross-cultural understanding, community studies, and career education, interrelate and contribute to shaping children's attitudes?
- What are the structural and human resource challenges faced by school organizations in relation to the above activities?

Title: Education Connecting Community and World: The Potential for Educational Reform in Fukuoka Prefecture's Toho Village Through Collaborative Practice with APU

Chapter 1: Introduction

- Activity Background
 - Challenges identified during the long-term internship at Toho Village's integrated elementary-middle school
- Review of Previous Research on the Issue
 - Identify consistencies and gaps between field practices/challenges and prior research
- Research Questions
- Methodology
 - Action research, Mixed methods research
- Report's Significance
 - Application to my own practice
 - Feedback for the field
- Composition of this report

Chapter 2: Review of Prior Practical Research on the Issue

- Definition of global human resources
- Children's attitude formation regarding education on international understanding and English
- Community studies education, entrepreneurship education, and community engagement

- Self-determination theory

Chapter 3: Summary of Toho Village and Each Activity

Chapter 4: Methodology

- Action research, Mixed methods research
- Data collection methods
 - Sampling
 - Surveys (quantitative and qualitative questions) and observation notes
- Data analysis methods
 - Coding (qualitative data)
 - Descriptive statistics (quantitative data)

Chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Answer to the research question

Significance: Application to my own practice and to practice/issues in the field

Limitations

Prospects

References

Additions

Survey

Code book

Activity Report Example 3

Example Activity: Internship at Toho Village's town hall

(Coordinating Field Study and other programs based on the Comprehensive Partnership Agreement with APU)

Research Question:

How does university-community collaboration in a mountainous and rural area affect the agency of local residents?

Title:

How Does University-Community Collaboration in a Mountainous and Rural Area Affect the Agency of Local Residents? A Case Study of Collaboration between Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University and Toho Village, Fukuoka Prefecture

Chapter 1: Introduction

- Activity Background
 - The collaboration project, which was supposed to be a partnership between Toho Village and the international university APU to pursue new regional revitalization, began to raise concerns. This was due to a sense of unease about the village's insufficient agency in the project.
- Review of Previous Research on the Issue
 - Nakatsuka's and Odagiri's (2016) arguments
 - ✧ Student activities have an impact on solving local issues and revitalizing the community
 - On one hand, research on host communities remains insufficient.
 - In other words, there is a gap between field practice and prior research, and prior research itself has shortcomings.
- Research Question
 - How does university-community collaboration in a mountainous and rural area affect the agency of local residents?
- Methodology
 - Case Study
 - Data Sources
 - ✧ My own personal experience
 - ✧ Observation notes

- ◇ Interviewing students who participated in Field Study (hereafter referred to as “FS”)

- Report's Significance
 - Increase the quality of the collaboration between APU and Toho Village
 - Contributing to my own future career

Chapter 2: Summary Explanation

- About Toho Village
 - Basic information
 - Community resources (Koishiwara potteries, Bamboo terraced fields, specialty products, etc.)
- Details of the collaboration with APU
 - Educational activities (International Exchange Day, Children's English Guides)
 - Administrative activities (FS, APU student participation in local events)

Chapter 3: Literature Review

- Sense of local ownership
- Interactions between students and the local community through university-community collaboration

Chapter 4: The Case Study

- Sense of local ownership
 - The positioning of current collaborative projects and the author's concerns
 - This year's improvement measures and the new challenges that emerged as a result
- Interactions between students and the local community through university-community collaboration
 - The author's awareness of problems based on FS observation notes
 - Interview results with FS participants

Chapter 5: Analysis of the Case Study

- Sense of local ownership
 - Analysis of factors leading to situations where FS participants propose regional development plans but do not implement them
- Interactions between students and the local community through university-community collaboration

- Analysis of factors contributing to the village being passive instead of cooperative
- Analysis of attitude change through interaction between FS participants and village residents

Chapter 6: Conclusion

- Answers to the research questions
- Significance: Application to my own practice and to practice/issues in the field
- Limitations
- Further research

References

Additions

Interview questions

Code book