Regarding Graduation Products

Contents
> （１） Q＆A about graduation products and registration
> （２） Capstone Guideline
> （３） Activity Report Outlines and Examples

（１） Q＆A about graduation products and registration

To graduate from the ST program, students must earn credits for one of the following two types of graduation projects:

(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 Graduation Research (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: Although the diagram on the website shows the course under the 7th semester, students may also take it in the 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 project 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 in the capstone course are pre-determined. Students select from several options provided in advance.

➢ 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 in advance, and the university will register for them.

(If a student continues with the same seminar from the 3rd year, registration will be automatically continued in the 4th year. ※)

➢ In contrast, for the capstone course, students must register for it themselves during the official course registration period in either the 7th or 8th semester.

※Note: If a student receive an F in the Graduation Research of the 7th semester, the student will not

be registered to Graduation Project in the 8th semester.

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

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

Comparative Table of Thesis, Activity Report, and Capstone

	Thesis	Activity Report	Capstone
Research Questions	Based on gaps in existing research	Based on consistencies or gaps between practices/challenges in the field and related prior research	Based on the specified topic and 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 issue by using 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 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 though it is pseudo
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
Faculty in charge	Seminar professor	Seminar professor	Capstone professor

● What is Capstone?

In the ST program, students are required to complete (i.e., to earn credits of) one of the following two types of graduation achievements to fulfill graduation requirements:

(1) Graduation Thesis or Activity Report: This is developed through seminar classes, i.e., Graduation Research in the 7th semester and completed in the Graduation Project during the 8th semester.

(2) Capstone: A graduation product submitted through the Capstone course 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/

● Words of ST Capstone Products

➢ The capstone outcome, 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 instructions of their seminar instructor), the "research question" addressed in the capstone must be chosen by each student from several pre-presented options.

➢ The length of the product has a standard of 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 or fail even if the word count standard is not met, is left to the discretion of each instructor. (For thesis, the standard is of more than 15,000 characters in Japanese or 6,500 words in English)

● Notes on Course Registration

➢ While seminar courses are registered by the university based on a prior application (and if a student does not change or cancel their seminar when advancing from the third to the fourth year, enrollment in the same seminar for graduation research is automatically continued), the capstone course must be 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 the seminar or take the Capstone.

➢ Although it is possible to register for both seminar course and capstone course simultaneously, doing so is not recommended, as producing each graduation requirement demands a significant amount of time and effort, which may result in failing to earn credits for either.

● Course Description

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

This course is the final course of the 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"/"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.

● Recommended Preparation for Enrollment

Students are expected to have sufficient knowledge and ability to select one question from among the prepared options and write a report that includes the essential components of an academic paper (see "Elements of the Capstone product" below).
The research questions will be proposed through each seminar instructor, selected by the faculty in charge of the Capstone, and announced in December.

● Instructors to Teach the Course, Number of Classes, Timetable

Instructors: Professor Yan LI and other ST faculty members (to be determined)
The course is offered in both the Spring and Fall semesters. Classes are scheduled at different times depending on the language, and classes conducted in the same language are held on the same day and during the same time period.

● Weekly Class Content

Content: Students select one research question from those provided and complete an individual report.
Week 1: Introduction. Each student selects a research question. If multiple students choose the same question, a group (maximum of three members) will be formed for peer learning, and each student begins preparing their own report.
Week 2: Under instructor guidance, students refine and specify their research question in greater detail.
Week 3 and onward: Classes consist of repeated cycles of instruction on academic writing and research methods, presentations, and discussions.
Note: Groups are formed for the purpose of peer learning, and sharing data and knowledge within the group is permitted. However, the report must be written individually by each student.

● Capstone Class Topics (Research Questions)

Proposal of Research Questions: Seminar instructors will compile and submit proposed questions (mid-November).
Publication of Selected List: Early December (to be announced on Moodle and the Academic Information website).
Note: The proposed questions are suggestions only, and the Capstone coordinator may select and refine or redefine them.

- **Evaluation Method**

Mid-term Report: 30%

Final Report: 50%

Evaluation criteria include:

    Whether all required elements of the Capstone product are included

    Whether the response to the selected research question is logical and supported by evidence

    Whether the required word count is met

    Whether the formatting is appropriate

Participation: 20%

- **Elements of the Capstone Product**

➢ <u>Title</u>

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

➢ <u>Research Question (Express the Title as a Question)</u>

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

➢ <u>Definition of Key Terms</u>

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.

➢ <u>Review and Critique of Previous Studies</u>

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.

➢ <u>Methodology of Data Collection and Analysis</u>

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).

➢ <u>Results, Discussion, and Findings</u>

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.

➢ <u>Recommendations Derived from the Findings or Answers</u>

➢ <u>Conclusion (Significance, Limitations, and Future Work)</u>

➢ <u>References</u>

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

- Schedule
  - ➤ Proposal of research questions: Deadline: Mid-November
    (Seminar supervisors collect students' proposals and submit them via survey)
  - ➤ Announcement of research questions: Early December
    (To be announced on Moodle and the Academic Information website)

Following pages are

（3）Activity Report Outlines and Examples

Activity Report/Outline

Title

<u>Chapter 1 (Approx. 400 words)</u>
- 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

<u>Chapter 2 (Approx. 900 words)</u>
- 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 does the activities of ABC Store impact food loss reduction and community welfare improvement in Beppu City?

➢ How does 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

Chater 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