



Introduction to Entry-Level Doctoral Capstones

The Doctoral Capstone, which consists of a Doctoral Capstone Experience and Capstone Project, is a major component of the curriculum of entry-level doctorate in occupational therapy (OTD) programs. The purpose of the Doctoral Capstone is to “provide an in-depth exposure to one or more of the following: clinical practice skills, research skills, administration, leadership, program and policy development, advocacy, education, and theory development” (Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education [ACOTE], 2020, p. 44).

• What is a Doctoral Capstone Experience?

- The Doctoral Capstone Experience (DCE) is a “14-week full-time in-depth exposure in a concentrated area that may include on-site and off-site activities that meets developed goals/objectives of the doctoral capstone” (ACOTE, 2020 p. 47).
- Students’ experiences during the DCE will involve various learning activities that will help them meet their individualized learning goals related to their identified area(s) of focus.
- Students will work closely with a Site Mentor (who does not need to be an occupational therapist but must demonstrate expertise in the area in which the student is completing their Doctoral Internship). They will also be supported by a Faculty Mentor who also has experience and expertise related to the students’ experience.

• What is the Capstone Project?

- The Capstone Project is a “project that is completed by a doctoral-level student that demonstrates the student’s ability to relate theory to practice and to synthesize in-depth knowledge in a practice area that relates to the capstone experience” (ACOTE, 2020, p. 47). The Capstone Project will be related to the area(s) of focus of the Doctoral Internship.
- Students will complete their Capstone Project during the DCE, but it will not be the only learning activity in which students engage during their DCE.

• Where might students complete their Doctoral Capstone Experiences?

- Students may work in traditional occupational therapy settings such as hospitals, clinics, or schools. They may also work within community-based organizations that serve individuals, communities, or populations with occupational needs that could benefit from programming developed with an occupational lens.

• What are some examples of Capstone Projects?

- Conducting a needs assessment and developing a program to address specific needs related to social participation, safety, health, occupational engagement, leisure, or mental health
- Developing educational modules or videos for clients or staff on related topics listed above
- Researching, developing, and leading a support group or educational program for caregivers
- Reviewing potential grant opportunities and supporting development of a grant
- Researching various outcome or evaluation tools, having therapists pilot them, and collecting data on the feedback
- Creating an evidence-based practice library for specialized interventions used in the setting
- Developing a program to connect families to community resources
- Clinical research could be a single-subject design to demonstrate the outcomes of a particular occupation-based intervention

- **What are the differences between a Doctoral Capstone Experience and Fieldwork?**
 - The table below (adapted from Cleary and Kemp, 2018) depicts the major differences between these two experiences.

Characteristic	Level II Fieldwork	Doctoral Capstone Experience
ACOTE Goals	“Entry-level generalist”	“In-depth skills” beyond generalist level
Administrator	Academic Fieldwork Coordinator (AFWC)	Doctoral Capstone Coordinator (DCC)
Supervisor & Credential	Fieldwork Educator-OTR/L	On-Site Mentor- may or may not be an OT, but must demonstrate “expertise”
Length	12 weeks full-time (480 hours)	14 weeks full-time (560 hours)
Productivity	Gradual caseload build-up with typical FTE by end	May/ may not bill for services depending on site and type of experience
Time On Site	100% of time on site	At least 80% on site
Duties	Provide direct or indirect services to client	Provide direct or indirect services to client, organization, or populations
Learning Objectives	Site develops (w/ input from AFWC & student)	Individualized & student developed (w/ input from on-site and faculty mentors)
Evaluation	Fieldwork Performance Evaluation	Individualized evaluation (based on program specific goals and student goals)
Placements	AFWC w/ student input	Student with DCC, site, and faculty mentor

- **What should I do if I am interested in hosting a Doctoral Capstone student at my site?**
 - Contact the Doctoral Capstone Coordinator or Program Director at a local OTD program. As of August 2022, there are four OTD Programs in Illinois that are accredited or at candidacy status:
 - Midwestern University (Downers Grove, IL)
 - Rush University (Chicago, IL)
 - Southern Illinois University Carbondale (Carbondale, IL)
 - University of Illinois at Chicago (Chicago, IL)

References:

Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education [ACOTE]. (2020). 2018 Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) Standards and Interpretive Guide. <https://acoteonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2018-ACOTE-Standards.pdf>

Cleary, D. & Kemp, E. (2018, April). Clinical & experiential education: Current roles & experiences. Presentation at the AOTA Academic Fieldwork and Capstone Coordinators Academic Leadership Council, Salt Lake City, UT.