

Alumni Comments on MAPs and Capstones, Class of 2001

Paper surveys were sent to the graduates of the class of 2001. 90 surveys were returned. The respondents are reasonably representative of their class in terms of majors. 38 (42%) said they had done a MAP or Capstone. The other 52 said they had not.

The first table shows the distribution, by major, of who had done or not done a MAP/Capstone. Double majors are counted twice in this table. Only Economics and English majors show a significant discrepancy in their likelihood of (not) doing a MAP.

	# who did a MAP	# who did not do a MAP
American Studies	1	2
Anthropology	3	3
Art	0	1
Biology	6	4
Chemistry	1	1
Chinese	0	1
Computer Science	1	2
Economics	4	10
Education	2	1
English	0	9
French	0	1
German	2	1
History	3	5
Independent	2	1
Mathematics	4	1
Music	3	0
Philosophy	1	4
Physics	1	4
Political Science	5	3
Psychology	1	2
Religious Studies	2	1
Spanish	0	2
Sociology	1	1
Theatre	2	0

The second table is perhaps more meaningful; it shows how many of these MAPs were completed in particular subject areas.

	# MAPs done in this area		# MAPs done in this area
Africana Studies	2	Latin American Studies	2
American Studies	1	Mathematics	3
Anthropology	5	Music	3
Biology	6	Philosophy	2
Chemistry	1	Political Science	2
Computer Science	1	Psychology	1
Education	1	Sociology	1
History	3	Theatre	2
Independent Majors	2		

Students who did a MAP are more likely to have gone straight to graduate school than students who did not do a MAP. However, in most cases it cannot be determined whether completion of a MAP led to or resulted from the student's desire to pursue an advanced degree.

	Did a MAP	Did not do a MAP
full-time job	53% (20)	62% (32)
graduate/professional school	32% (12)	17% (9)
other activity	15% (6)	21% (11)

Benefits Noted from Doing a MAP

Eight of the respondents who had done a MAP said that it had had no effect on them. Five of those, however, said it had been an excellent experience. Only three were dissatisfied with their MAP or Capstone. The others listed one of more of the benefits in the table below.

Benefit Noted	# of respondents listing this benefit
preparation for graduate/professional school	9
preparation for career	6
learned about the research process	5
gave conference presentation	5
made student want to get an advanced degree	4
synthesized the student's work at Grinnell	3
conducted/was responsible for a large project	2
made student want to do more research	2
student learned a lot about a single topic	1
attention to publication	1
very hands-on learning experience	1
developed thinking/problem-solving skills	1
developed writing skills	1
extended classroom theory to a practical project	1
increased ability to work independently	1
student learned s/he was capable of high-level work	1
learned to see education in larger than semester chunks	1

Comments are listed by the student's major (which is not necessarily the subject in which they did a MAP).

American Studies/Gender and Women's Studies

- I had senior seminars for both American Studies and GWS. I don't think either has had an effect on my post-grad life and neither of the classes were particularly rewarding/interesting/beneficial to my Grinnell education. If the majors and concentrators could have had more input into the content of these classes, it would have helped tremendously.

Anthropology

- Studied cultural/heritage tourism in Wales, Welsh language ideology, nationalism and devolution. 10 week research and senior thesis, 7 weeks in Wales on a research grant from the college. Helping present a co-authored paper using some of my data, with Prof. Caulkins at a conference in Santa Fe in February. This solidified my desire to do more research after Grinnell, get an advanced degree! Also (more importantly) was excellent in

- making me solely responsible for carrying out a project, start to finish, and experience being fully immersed in the research (being alone in Wales for 3 weeks, becoming part of a community for a short time).
- MAP seminar in Experimental Archaeology. Useful because of the attention paid to research and publication.
 - Went to Scotland and researched political organizations. Well, my advisor did not make time for me to do any follow up research or projects, so it pretty much ended there.

Anthropology/Physics

- For my MAP, I worked to experimentally identify factors that may have influenced thermal shock resistance of ceramics found in the archaeological record. This project was unique in my experience at Grinnell. I learned less about archaeology than research procedures, and a great deal about project presentation. I value that experience and am glad I participated in it, but it can hardly be called a culminating experience; my Grinnell education was much broader than and mostly unrelated to my MAP.

Biology

- I studied human manipulation of forest flora in Belize with Campbell's biodiversity class. This was perhaps the most hands-on experience I had at Grinnell, and I hope I can draw on this experience some day in terms of my career or graduate work.
- I did neuroscience research. It taught me many things about the realities of science, and enriched my experience as a scientist. Without it, I don't know whether or not I would be where I am now (graduate school).
- I think that a year-long program I did involving summer research and a class the semesters before and after was one of the first MAPs. It was an amazing experience but would have happened regardless of the MAP program because it had been planned prior to its inception.
- I participated in directed summer research, which I was told was officially a capstone. I think this research experience was important, as it influenced my decision to attend graduate school. It also helped me prepare for a possible career in research that no other class could. While labs from individual classes help, it's not the same as having a large project to conduct.
- I developed a DNA fingerprint of a fungi as part of a greater ecological project. I really enjoyed this experience as it challenged me to be an independent thinker and a creative problem solver. Both of these I will use in medical school and as a doctor.
- I researched a wildflower called *Clarkia xantiana* in terms of how water status may have brought about its forming of a subspecies which was smaller and self-fertilized. I had a good time with the project but I haven't stayed in that field. I feel like doing the research was educational but not too influential on my career.

Chemistry

- I performed a summer chemistry internship and thought it was a great experience because it provided me with valuable experience which helped me get into graduate school.

Computer Science/Economics

- Title was "Palm Operating System Programming and Applications." It was a good way to extend theoretical classroom work to a practical project. I am currently working on a project that is an extension of my Grinnell research (I do this part-time).

Economics/Latin American Studies

- I did a thesis for my Latin American Studies concentration. It hasn't had that much effect yet. It did help with major research and writing skills.

German/Western European Studies

- I researched adapted and intentional tourist sites in England and collected data in person during winter and spring breaks my senior year. My research is being included in a joint paper with two other alums and Prof. Caulkins, and we are presenting it at the end of February at the Society for Cross-Cultural Research meeting. The MAP experience has shown me that, as a Grinnell grad, I'm capable of work that I'd otherwise have expected of grad students.

Independent

- I did a senior thesis to complete my independent major. I'm actually trying to forget this experience because it didn't work very well for me. I learned a lot in the research aspect but I had a great deal of trouble focusing my paper. Despite this experience I'm still considering trying to go to grad school.
- Studied economic and political aspects of European Union expansion in Eastern Europe, especially with respect to agriculture. Very distinctive, but no impact on post-graduate life.

Mathematics

- Math research. I loved the experience, but it had little effect on what I'm doing now.

Mathematics/Economics

- Summer research in math in 2000. Improved my ability to work independently on difficult projects, to teach myself in some sense.

Mathematics/Education

- Researched gendered teacher-student interactions. I student-taught last semester, so it was useful to know behaviors to look for.

Mathematics/History

- I did summer research in math, took the Tocqueville MAP seminar, and the "Age of Revolution" MAP seminar. I thought that all of these were valuable experiences, with or without MAP designations.

Music

- I wrote a paper comparing a song by Faure and a song by Debussy with the same text. Not very distinctive compared to what everyone else was doing, but very distinctive compared to what else I'd done at Grinnell. The whole structure was different. I loved it. No effect on my life since graduation, but it acted as a good culmination of my music studies. I also did a senior thesis for the music department, which really does qualify as one of these experiences.

Music/Economics

- Multimedia and electronic music composition. These projects single-handedly got me into graduate programs.

Music/History

- Structural and Metaphorical Analysis of Carl Nielsen's Concerto for Flute and Orchestra. Paper and presentation on this topic, recital performance that included this work. Experience gave me a great look into the kind of research I'll be doing in grad school.

Philosophy

- I did a MAP class on Tocqueville; I enjoyed the research project. I did a capstone on Spinoza and Nietzsche; I have continued this research in grad school; the paper helped get me admitted.

Political Science

- I was in D.A. Smith's Tocqueville capstone class. This inter-disciplinary study of the famous author provided a forum in which I was able to synthesize much of the information/ideas I had gained from Grinnell within perspectives throughout the disciplines.
- I participated in a three-semester project on post-Soviet Russian public opinion. The goal was a statistically sound journal-caliber paper on a topic of interest in the field of comparative post-Soviet politics. This experience led me to my current endeavor, graduate school. The project engulfed my last two years at Grinnell, requiring me to think about education in terms of more than just one-semester go-arounds. Not all MAPs would have been this successful. Most other students (at the time, mind you) regarded their MAPs as a burden, one which was basically like a term project. The MAP experience I had pushed me beyond terms into a world of continuous academics.
- Bob Grey's Russian Public Opinion – looked at Russian nationalism and language laws. Excellent experience working with SPSS, writing research paper with extensive feedback. Both to present papers at 2 research conferences. That writing as well as all the other writing at Grinnell has strongly prepared me for my legal writing seminars at law school.
- Mississippi Delta Travel Seminar. Went to various places in MS to examine history, music, and culture. I have made life-long contacts as a result. It has given me an appreciation of legal cases as I examine them in law school.

Political Science/African Studies

- Didn't do an independent study for my major, but received funding for an Africana Studies Travel Seminar the first year MAPs were considered. We traveled to the Mississippi Delta to "study" race representation as played out in the southern context. We met with community leaders, politicians, cotton farmers and it was the most awesome academic experience ever. I'm planning on pursuing this field for grad school. Also, I received a grant from ACM to do an independent study, which was a huge learning experience in terms of working on a research project that was extensive and overwhelming. Taught me how better to focus my attention and time for research and writing.

Psychology

- I worked closely with a faculty member coding, analyzing, and discussing data. Then I wrote up an APA style article and presented my results in a symposium. Along with my summer research experience, this really piqued my interest in psychology and influenced me to go to grad school, while having an idea about what I was in for. I doubt I would have gone to grad school without these experiences.

Religious Studies

- Nietzsche Capstone Seminar and gave symposium talk. It has had very little effect on what I've done since graduation, but it was a high point of my academic life at Grinnell.

Religious Studies/Latin American Studies

- I did a senior research project for Latin American Studies. This project gave me a goal to work for, and made me learn a lot about a single topic, while making my research/writing skills better. Also, I wrote on issues of women's health, an area in which I am currently working.

Sociology

- I completed a sociology research MAP, during the summer, under the direction of Chris Hunter. Although it doesn't relate exactly to the work I do now, it was a valuable experience. I plan to do academic research again in my career in education.

Theatre

- I found my capstone classes unrewarding. It was the first time they had tried it, and was more like advanced acting and directing than a well-rounded capstone. (I worked in the technical side of theatre.) I have not found the experience useful.
- My project involved the development of a traveling theatre production. This class provided me an opportunity to work with a wonderful group of people and integrate all of my prior knowledge about theatre.

Reasons for Not Doing a MAP

Reason Given	# listing this reason
did not seem to be an option or didn't work out	18
did a culminating seminar or research project instead	9
not enough time in schedule	8
it would have been too hard	6
did not want to focus on something that specific	5
philosophically opposed to the concept	5
not interested	3

Comments are listed below. Students who listed more than one reason are double-counted, and their comments have been split up under the relevant headings.

Did not seem to be an option:

- To be honest, I didn't quite understand that it was an option for everyone, the logistics of doing a MAP or Capstone were not universally well advertised, only promoted by certain advisors.
- It was before my time, and I was biology major.
- The program wasn't highly developed. It seemed like a lot of work to organize my own and none that were offered were in my fields of interest.
- Not offered to me.
- Wasn't widely done in econ.
- None appeared to be offered in my major (econ). If such an experience was an option, I was never made aware of it.
- I was pursuing other experiences: student teaching. Also, I wasn't very aware of MAP/Capstone possibilities, what exactly they are, how to get involved, etc.
- It didn't appear any were offered in my major (history) and it was a lot easier just to take classes and graduate.
- It just never occurred to me. I student taught ninth semester so I was focusing on that.
- There wasn't one that combined with philosophy my senior year.
- There weren't any psychology professors that I got to know well enough to feel comfortable asking them to be a mentor for such a project. In retrospect I think it would have been a really good opportunity, but I never considered it as a serious option. I think that if the professors encouraged such a thing, more students would initiate a capstone. I wasn't familiar with the processes of initiating such study on my own.
- No professor encouraged me to think about doing one. In hindsight, I imagine it would have been a rewarding experience and I wish I had taken the initiative to at least learn more about my opportunities.
- It wasn't something I was really aware of until late senior year.
- I don't think the MAP/capstone was very well publicized for my class.
- No need, no options that fit my needs.

- I tried to arrange a MAP in creative writing, but was told it was not possible. Instead, I set up an independent study that turned out to be much like a MAP. I created a portfolio of my poetry, which gave me confidence in my writing.
- I actually wanted to do one, but was not guaranteed of funding and the research fell through because of this fact.
- The one influential professor that would have encouraged me to do a capstone left, like all the other American Studies professors.

Did some other culminating experience instead.

- The seminar I had (Art History) was enough of a culminating experience for me. I was able to do primary research on a new topic.
- I did independent research with my advisor instead.
- I don't know if it counts as a MAP/Capstone project, but I did engage in independent research projects in chemistry away from Grinnell. One project was conducted at the U of Leiden in the Netherlands, and this was a memorable experience for me, not just scientifically, but culturally as well.
- Our last American Studies course was supposed to be like a capstone, but was taught by a new professor, and thus more of a new class versus a knowledge culminating forum.
- I did two independent projects which to me acted as a good substitute for a culminating academic experience or capstone.
- I felt that intensive seminar work in English was equivalent to a capstone in that particular subject.
- I had a culminating academic experience; it was the Dostoevsky seminar. It integrated all subjects and taught me MUCH more than my independent study which could have qualified as a MAP.
- I took a senior seminar in German which seemed good enough.
- Wrote a thesis for independent major instead.

Not enough time.

- I was too busy participating in other activities.
- It was still under discussion. I was double majoring – too much to deal with already.
- Never thought about it; never had the time.
- Difficult to do with a double major. Lack of ambition.
- Not enough time; no interest in doing one.
- With a double major, I had a hard enough time fulfilling both majors' requirements.
- Too busy trying to finish my major.
- I had more than enough work without another project.

Too hard.

- I barely made it through Grinnell as is – something requiring as much original thought and self-direction was out of the question.
- I wanted a balance between social and academic, and a MAP would have been too much academic. I didn't feel I was studying just to get a good job, so if I didn't want to push myself I felt it was okay.
- I was abroad first semester senior year and wanted a slightly less intense final term.
- Extra work? Actually, not aware such projects existed, although I'm sure overachieving bookworms may have done them.
- Coming from a small rural high school, I was somewhat ill-prepared for Grinnell's work load. Though the idea of a MAP appealed to me, I had enough to do just completing my required seminars. Perhaps if the overall workload were somewhat reduced, more students might consider MAPs/Capstones.
- Capstone program had just begun and I was not interested in participating due to an already strenuous course load.

Did not want to focus.

- It didn't interest me. I wasn't ready to focus on one project like that.
- I didn't have one specific thing I was willing to put that much effort into. It has taken me till just now to know what I want to further my studies in.
- I was not interested in focusing on one specific subject area.
- I felt that the broadest liberal arts program was more important (Phi Beta Kappa, etc).
- Graduating was culmination enough. I preferred taking broad courses, not focusing on a minute area of philosophy.

Philosophically opposed to concept.

- Back in my day, the student body, myself included, thought MAPs were an Osgoodian plot to make us look preppier than we are. I had a lot of tough classes and some of them forced me to integrate much of my past knowledge and experience to create a fresh piece of work. I hope that even without an official "capstone" experience, that still counts for something.
- Just didn't strike me as something I particularly wanted to do. I didn't really like the implication that without some "culminating" project my education was incomplete or less fulfilling/meaningful somehow.
- I certainly wouldn't call them "culminating academic experiences." You needn't have a MAP/Capstone for that!
- I did not feel it was necessary to complete my education – I felt my time was better spent taking normal courses.
- I don't really know what a "culminating academic experience" is. In fact, I get really tired of Grinnell's fancy political words and uppity attitude. Do you know what graduate schools really want? Good GPAs. The problem is that it is very difficult to get a 3.6 or above a Grinnell because of all the grade deflation. I am tired of seeing less intelligent people from inferior schools get into med school or other top schools before my fellow Grinnell alums simply because they had a 3.9 GPA. If you really want to help us get jobs and graduate school opportunities, quite worrying about "culminating academic experiences" and quite deflating our grades. A blind grading policy would also be nice. While I was at Grinnell, it was a known fact that people that went in once a week to discuss things with the professor were more likely to get better grades. Now, we can't control for all the variables, but I would like to see if this correlation would persist if there was a blind grading policy.

Not interested.

- Never thought about it; just wasn't moved to.
- Because I chose not to do any culminating experience. I was happy with the education I had received.
- Probably laziness on my part.