Senior Shared Passages Capstones: 
Suggestions for Conversations on “Life After K” 
CCPD, January 2014

Senior Shared Passages Capstones provide a unique opportunity for students to:

- reflect on their K-Plan,
- craft a narrative of their education, and
- explore the relevance of the knowledge and skills they've developed for their post-graduation lives.

Of the five programmatic components common to all Senior Capstones (https://reason.kzoo.edu/spp/senior/faculty/), two relate clearly to students’ career development:

- Encourage students to explore connections (and disconnections) among components of their K-Plan.
- Invite students to articulate a narrative of their education in anticipation of their lives after graduation.

In spring 2013 pilot sessions, the CCPD led a classroom discussion of skills and competencies both sought by employers and necessary for entrepreneurs, and invited conversation and reflection on how these same skills and competencies had been developed and honed through the Senior Capstone experience, even if they weren’t labeled as such.

In these pilot sessions, students learned how to “translate” their varied educational accomplishments into language that potential employers would understand and appreciate. They began to recognize that the skills and qualities cultivated by the K-Plan (effective communication, problem-solving, critical thinking) were actually highly sought in the working world. At the same time, a number of students were less interested in the career applications of their education than the civic engagement opportunities. More than “How has my K-Plan prepared me?” or “What job will I do?,” these students wanted to reflect on bigger questions:

- “How do I want to live my life?”
- “What will I give to the world?”
- “What will success look like for me?”

We therefore recommend that conversations about “Life after K” integrate questions of values, meaning, and individual priorities along with attention to career aspirations.

Faculty teaching Senior Capstones might consider a three-step approach to facilitating students’ reflection around these questions:
1. Introduce and discuss the “skills sought by employers” and “qualities of a successful entrepreneur” rubric, and invite students to fill in examples of situations in the seminar that showcased some of these skills and qualities (see attached rubric). If desired, CCPD staff is available to help facilitate this discussion.

2. Choose one of the senior spring prompts in the K-Plan Commonplace and use it as a writing assignment:
   a. How has your Senior Capstone Seminar helped you make connections among components of your Kalamazoo College education?
   b. What facets of your education are most influential when looking to the future?
   c. Describe a transformational learning experience, and reflect on how you will use what you learned in the future.
   d. How has your K-Plan contributed to your aspirations for the future?

3. Have your students prepare and deliver orally in class a brief articulation of their K-Plan and how it has prepared them for life after K, perhaps allowing them to select one of these questions as a guide:
   a. “How has my K-Plan prepared me for a career?”
   b. “How do I want to live my life?”
   c. “What will I give to the world?”
   d. “What will success look like for me?”

Here are some ways the CCPD can support faculty in fostering these kinds of reflection and exploration in a Senior Capstone:

- Identify and invite alumni professionals who can share reflections on how their K education has impacted their career paths, and encourage students to draw parallels to their own K-Plan experiences
- Review and offer feedback on students’ résumés, either collected as a class assignment or via individual appointments with career counselors
- Introduce the skills translation rubric worksheet and lead a class discussion on how to “translate” the skills and competencies gained at K into recruiter-friendly language

Appendix 1: Senior Capstones CCPD Session Outline, with Skills Rubric

Appendix 2: K Student Learning Outcomes Lead to Skills and Qualifications Sought by Employers, CCPD, January 2014 (separate document)
Appendix 1: Senior Capstone CCPD Session Outline

Senior Capstones provide a unique opportunity for students to reflect on their K-Plan, craft a narrative of their education, and explore the relevance of the knowledge and skills they’ve developed for their post-graduation lives. Following is an outline for a facilitated discussion aimed at helping students articulate a narrative of their education that will advance their post-graduate goals, whatever they may be. (CCPD staff may be available to facilitate this discussion if desired.)

Session objectives:

1. Students will be able to recognize and articulate the existential questions and practical considerations faced during this time of transition from college to their next step
2. Students will be able to identify and articulate their unique life aspirations and definitions of “success,” which may include varying combinations of personal, ethical, and career aspirations (some seeking jobs, some seeking meaning, happiness, learning, social change, balance, rest)
3. Students will be able to recognize and articulate the transferrable skills and experiences that will be valuable in the world outside K, whatever their post-graduate plans

Session outline:

Before class: Students are asked to write and bring to class a one-page reflection on the following question:

How will what you’ve learned in this class, and throughout your time at K, be useful in your life after K?

In class: Facilitated conversation in three segments:

1. Considering Life After K
   a. Set the stage with general questions:
      i. How do you feel about the future? This time of transition gives seniors multiple conflicting feelings: sense of fear, excitement, unknown, etc.
      ii. How will you define “success” in your life after K?
      iii. How has this four years prepared you for your life?
   b. Invite students to share their reflections on the pre-class assignment
      i. What did you realize about your learning in this class and at K?
      ii. What surprised you?
      iii. As a result of this reflection, what actions might you plan to take between now and graduation?

2. Translating Your K-Plan into the Language of the Working World
   a. Introduce current trends in hiring:
      i. A résumé has at most 30 seconds to make an impression
ii. If it is being “read” by a program, it has to include the “right”
words to pass the screen
iii. Your self-description, a.k.a. “elevator pitch,” has about the
same length of time to convince your audience
iv. Outcomes of a liberal arts education are highly sought by
recruiters but not always articulated by students

b. Introduce vocabulary: skills sought by employers and characteristics
   of successful social entrepreneurs (handout)
i. These words describe skills and qualities that resonate with
   employers, funders, and decision-makers
ii. These words also describe outcomes of a K education
iii. Using these terms when describing your skills and experience
   will help others understand what you have to offer

b. Invite students to share their own K-Plan examples of these skills and
   characteristics, tying discussion to pre-class reflection and filling in
   the boxes of the handout worksheet

3. **Using This Language to Tell Your K-Plan Story**
   a. Introduce the importance of having stories ready to tell
      i. Stories that underscore the skills and qualities above
      ii. Stories about challenge, creativity, teamwork
      iii. Five good stories can be used to answer most interview
           questions
   b. Incorporating the language in the handout, invite students to share
      specific stories about their learning based on experiences in this class
      during the quarter (for example, how working on a team project
      prepared me to be a confident and creative collaborator; how leading
      a class discussion taught me how to adapt to unexpected events)
   c. Invite peers to make suggestions on how to strengthen stories using
      handout language; have student re-tell stories incorporating peer
      feedback

At conclusion of session, encourage students to follow up at the CCPD:

1. Website resources available 24/7
2. Make an appointment with a career counselor, even after graduation (in
   person, by phone or Skype)
3. Join the Guilds on LinkedIn for expert career advice from alumni (take your
   network with you when you graduate)

[next two sheets can be used as a back-to-back handout]
Top skills and competencies sought in new college hires

- Verbal communication
- Teamwork
- Problem-solving
- Planning/organizing
- Research/critical thinking
- Quantitative analysis
- Technical knowledge related to the job
- Computer software proficiency
- Writing/editing
- Leadership/management

“The ideal candidate is a good communicator who can make decisions and solve problems while working effectively in a team.”

NACE (National Association of Colleges and Employers) Job Outlook 2014, November 2013

Top skills and competencies of successful social entrepreneurs

- Innovation
- Motivation/drive
- Creativity
- Problem-solving
- Goal orientation
- Flexibility/adaptability
- Bold action
- Teamwork
- Passionate for a cause
- Strong ethics

“Social entrepreneurs have the same core temperament as their industry-creating, business entrepreneur peers but instead use their talents to solve social problems on a society-wide scale ... Both types of entrepreneur recognize when a part of society is stuck and provide new ways to get it unstuck.”

William Drayton, Ashoka; https://www.ashoka.org/social_entrepreneur
List examples of how you have developed these skills and competencies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbal communication</th>
<th>Self-regulation/time management</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Innovation/creativity</td>
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