



Highlighting Your Capstone Project for Employers

Introduction:

When employers are looking to hire soon-to-be and recent college graduates, they often expect to see project-based experience on their resumes. While you likely completed a number of projects during your time in college, you will want to highlight larger projects that spanned longer periods of time and helped you develop skillsets that are directly relevant to the jobs and internships to which you are applying. Highlighting your experience completing a senior-level project with a live client during Capstone is a great way to showcase how what you have learned in college has prepared you for the world of work.

Highlighting Project-Based Experience on Your Resume:

At the heart of any resume is the experience you showcase to help the employer understand the relevant skillsets and experience you possess that make you a great candidate for the job or internship for which you are applying. One subset of experience that you may choose to highlight on your resume is project-based experience from the courses you completed while in school.

When adding project-based experience to your resume, you will want to be sure to:

- Give the project a name or title
- Note which class you completed the project in
- Note the start and end dates, either in month year to month year format (e.g., August 2019 – December 2019) or semester format (e.g., Fall semester 2019)
- Include strong accomplishment statements in bullet point format that drive home what you accomplished, what you learned and the skillsets you developed
- Be careful not to stretch the truth, as your resume should be 100% honest

Here is what a Relevant Projects section might look like on your resume:

RELEVANT PROJECTS

Senior Capstone Project, MECH 416/417 Mechanical Systems Design I and II

Sept 2020 - April 2021

- Collaborated with 4 peers to research, design and build a two-phase cooling system analyzation program.
- Built a program in MATLAB with an Excel interface to gather data.
- Assembled the prototype cooling system and tested to verify accuracy of the software.
- Written proposal and presentation delivered to the sponsor.

Project Title, Name of Class

Semester 20XX

- What was the result? Did you present your work?
 - Highlight engineering and transferable skills you demonstrated: teamwork, collaboration, analysis, design, programming, writing skills, verifying data, problem-solving, leadership.
 - Be discrete and maintain confidentiality, you may not be able to identify the company you worked with, but you want to give the reader an idea of what the project entailed, using generic identifiers such as local electronics or manufacturing company. Each project should only have about 3 explanatory bullets.
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Discussing Project-Based Experience in an Interview:

When interviewing for a job or internship, you should be prepared to respond to behavioral interview questions. Behavioral interview questions are based on the premise that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. Behavior interview questions often start with statements like, “Describe...”, “Tell us about a time when...”, or “Give us an example of...”. Employers often ask about things like your experience working in teams, solving problems, addressing or defusing conflict and more.

Highlighting the experience you gained and the lessons you learned through class projects is a great way to help employers understand how the skills you gained in college have helped prepare you for the opportunity for which you are applying! When responding to behavioral interview questions and other questions that ask you to provide a specific example, it is important to provide a detailed yet concise response. One way to do this is to utilize the S.T.A.R. method. S.T.A.R. responses are comprised of:

- **S- Situation**
 - Describe the situation; provide the interviewer with context that sets the stage for the example (e.g., “While completing my capstone project at WSU Vancouver...” or “While working on a team project...”)
- **T- Task**
 - Help the interviewer understand the task at hand, so they have a sense of what you were trying to accomplish (e.g., “I had the opportunity to work in a team of five to develop a detailed proposal for the design and production of an engine enclosure” or “I had the chance to analyze the causes of fatigue in a production tool, helping the company to develop solutions.”)
- **A- Action(s)**
 - Describe the action(s) you took to address the task at hand. Make sure to be as specific as possible about the work you completed and actions that you personally took
- **R- Result(s)**
 - Describe the outcome of the situation and the result(s) of your action(s)
 - Discuss what you learned from this experience and how you would approach a similar situation in the future (i.e., would you approach the situation similarly or would your approach differ based on what you learned?)

As you prepare for an interview, it can be helpful to thoroughly review the position description, making note of the skills and experience the employer states are essential for the role. After you have a solid sense of the position, take some time to review your resume and reflect on the projects and experiences you have had in order to generate several examples you can easily reference during the interview. Using examples will help you drive home the skills and experience you possess that make you a great fit for the role!