



# Developing Purpose: Laurel School's Capstone Experience

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**LAUREL**

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# Introductions

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# Laurel School Overview

- PK-12 (all girls in K-12): 650 students total, 276 students in Upper School
- Three central tenets of Curricular Philosophy:
  - Experiential
  - Interdisciplinary
  - Community-Based

# Beginnings of Capstone: Existing Programs

- Protégé Internship Program
- Passport Program
- Veale Entrepreneurship Program
- Community Service
- STEAM Initiatives
- Gators Go Global

# Goals to Begin

- Create a multi-year platform for Upper School students
- Provide an avenue to complete a culminating project more meaningful than a “senior project”
- Connect Upper School students with other divisions

# Laurel's Center for Research on Girls

- Five Components of Resilience
  - Relationships
  - Creativity
  - Self-Care
  - Growth Mindset
  - Purpose
    - (ultimately the focus of the Capstone Experience)

# Question #1 for Small Groups to Consider

- How does a school emphasize purpose beyond earning grades?
- How does a school measure that sense of purpose?

# Brainstorming Process

- Begin with four categories:
  - Civic Engagement
  - Entrepreneurship
  - Global Studies
  - STEAM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics



# Brainstorming Process, continued

- Capstone Experience would have three key features:
  - Research Focus
  - Mentorship
  - Internship Experience

# Brainstorming, continued

- Visit to Norfolk Academy in Norfolk, VA to see Center for Civic and Global Leadership
  - Witnessed the value of a cohort of students

# Brainstorming, continued

- Formed an advisory council to examine:
  - Should Capstone be a competitive admissions process?
  - How will parents perceive this offering generally?
  - How do we communicate this new program to the community?

# Outside Support from the Edward E. Ford Foundation

- \$50,000 matching grant, allowing Capstone to start with a total of \$100,000

## Question #2 for Small Groups to Consider

- Should this program be competitive entry or should it be open to all interested students?

# Debut of the Capstone Experience

- Announced in January of 2016
- 31 Grade 9 students apply (out of class of 65)
- 43 Grade 10 students apply (out of class of 75)

# The Application Process

- A competitive application process that includes:
  - A Statement of Intent
  - Two essays
  - 10-15 minute interview
  - Two recommendations
- Each category would have 4-6 students (not public information)

# Selection Process

- Faculty members' feedback
- Upper School administrators' and grade-level leaders' feedback
- Goal: Make each Cohort functional and diverse



# Acceptances

- 24 Grade 10 students (6 per category, out of 43 applicants)
- 20 Grade 9 students (5 per category, out of 31 applicants)

## Question # 3 for Small Groups to Consider

- In addition to annual tuition, should a family pay a fee for a program like Capstone? If so, how much?

# Finances

- \$500 yearly fee, with financial aid available for qualifying families
- The fee supports:
  - MayTerm experiences in Grade 9
  - Travel in Grade 10
  - Honorariums to Mentors

# Capstone MayTerm, May 2016

- Started with a three-day, two-night camping trip
- Each category cohort planned a one-day, Cleveland-based excursion
  - Example: Global Studies students collaborated with Cleveland Council for World Affairs

# Academic Year 2016-17

- Bi-weekly Cohort meetings
  - Harkness discussions
  - Plan for Spring Break trips
- Fall of 2016: Class of '18 determine Research Focus and Mentors
- April of 2017: Class of '19 determine Research Focus and Mentors

# Capstone Experience Trips



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# Mentors for the Research Focus

- Possibly our most challenging component
  - Value of mentors/mentorship
  - Honorarium

# Student Highlights

- Fantasy novel (STEAM cohort)
- Chef (Entrepreneurship cohort)
- Photographic portfolio (Civic Engagement cohort)
- Health Research in underserved communities in different nations (Global Studies cohort)



# 3 Points of Emphasis: Purpose, Relationships, Leadership

- **PURPOSE**

- No grades/rankings in Capstone
- Students own every part of program
- LCRG study related to purpose and Capstone

# 3 Points of Emphasis: Purpose, Relationships, Leadership, continued

- **RELATIONSHIPS**
  - Peer to peer
  - Student to staff
  - Student to Mentor

# 3 Points of Emphasis: Purpose, Relationships, Leadership, continued

- **LEADERSHIP**
  - Student ownership
  - Inter-division activities

## Question #4 for Small Groups to Consider

- Should Capstone be a recognized time commitment for students and faculty members (i.e., replace a class, activity, or responsibility)?
- How should a school recognize students who complete the program?

# Challenges/Opportunities

- Fundraising
- Finding Mentors
- Staffing and FTEs
- Extra work/commitments for students

# Successes So Far

- Resonance in community
- MayTerm
- Positive parent involvement and feedback
- E.E. Ford Grant
- Collaboration and collegiality among category leaders
- LCRG involvement

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