



Doctoral Capstone Experience
&
Doctoral Capstone Project

Manual
Process, Policies & Procedures

Class of 2026

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Introduction

Students engage in a 14-week Doctoral Capstone Experience concurrently with a Capstone Project course in the final semester of the program. The goal of the experience and project is to develop occupational therapists with in-depth exposure in an area of individual interest, in one of the following areas: clinical practice skills, research skills, program and policy development, advocacy, or education (ACOTE® D.1.0). The experience and project are designed in coordination with the Department of Occupational Therapy curriculum.

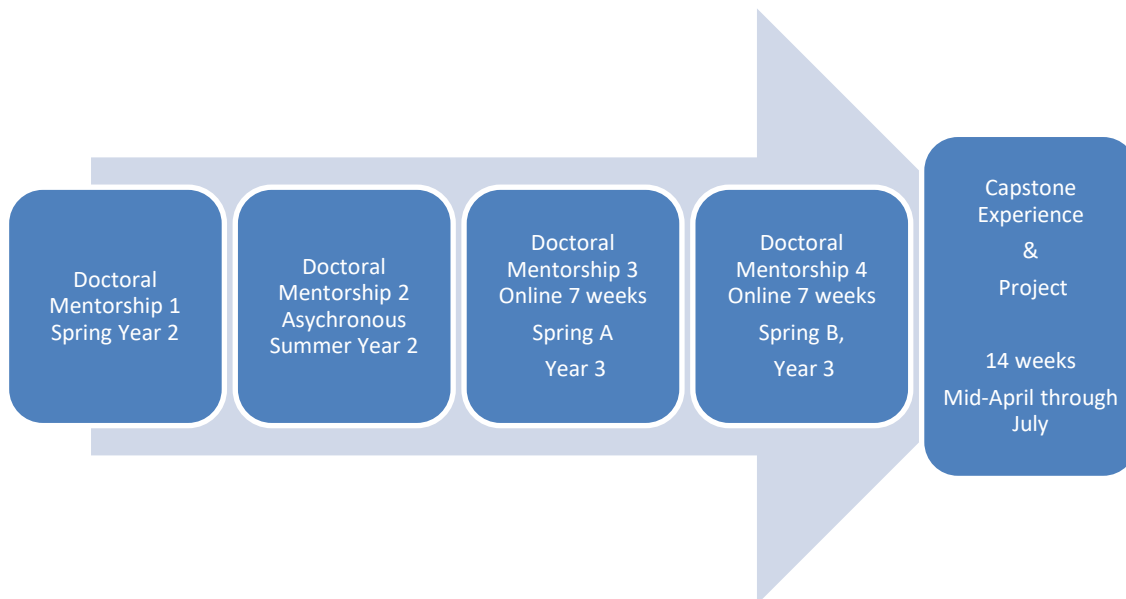
The Doctoral Capstone Experience and preparation is under the direction of the Doctoral Capstone Coordinator. Each student will have an assigned faculty mentor with expertise in their area of study. Specific individualized objectives will be developed in collaboration with the student, faculty mentor, and a site mentor. One of the mentors will serve as the content expert or an additional mentor may be added for content expertise if indicated.

Prerequisites for the Capstone Experience and Project courses are successful completion of:

- Level I and Level II fieldwork experiences.
- All didactic course work.

The Doctoral Capstone Experience and Doctoral Capstone Project must be completed within 18 months of completion of the prerequisites.

Figure 1. Sequence of Doctoral Mentorship and Capstone Courses.



Program Outcomes and Themes

Upon completion of the program, graduates of the University of Florida OTD program will:

- 1) Develop and implement theoretically-sound, evidence-based occupational therapy programs and practices that incorporate an ecological perspective of human health (*Theme: Human Occupation and Health*)
- 2) Integrate rigorous critical thinking and sound clinical reasoning when implementing best practices for optimal outcomes for individuals, communities, and populations. (*Theme: Critical Thinking for Practice and Scholarship*)
- 3) Commit to ethical reasoning that intrinsically represents the highest ethical standards, values, and attitudes of the profession (*Theme: Professionalism*)
- 4) Champion the occupational performance of individuals, communities, and populations to support health and well-being within culturally diverse contexts (*Theme: Valuing of Diversity*)
- 5) Practice with an interprofessional and collaborative perspective of client care (*Theme: Collaborative Practice*)
- 6) Conduct occupation-based assessments and implement occupation-based interventions to increase participation across contexts for individuals, communities, and populations (*Theme: Psychomotor Skills*)

The Capstone Experience and Capstone Project, along with the four Doctoral Mentorship preparatory courses, link to the University of Florida OTD program outcomes and curricular themes and support the overarching curricular goal. For more details and background, please refer to the Doctor of Occupational Therapy Student Manual.

2023 ACOTE® Doctoral Capstone Standards

D.1.0. Doctoral Capstone <https://acoteonline.org/accreditation-explained/standards/>

The goal of the doctoral capstone is to provide an in-depth exposure to one or more of the following areas in occupational therapy:

- Clinical skills
- Research skills
- Administration
- Program development and evaluation
- Policy development
- Advocacy
- Education
- Leadership

The doctoral capstone consists of two parts:

- 1) Capstone experience
- 2) Capstone project

The student will complete a 14-week capstone experience and an individual related capstone project to demonstrate synthesis and application of knowledge gained.

D.1.1.	Ensure that the doctoral capstone is designed through collaboration with the student, a faculty member in the occupational therapy educational program who holds a doctoral degree, and an individual with documented expertise in the content area of the capstone.
D.1.2.	Document that the content expert is informed of the plan for and purpose of the doctoral capstone and has content expertise in the focus area.
D.1.3.	<p>Document that the doctoral capstone is an integral part of the program’s curriculum design.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflects the mission and philosophy of the program. • Contributes to the development of in-depth knowledge in the designated area of interest. • Includes preparation consisting of a literature review, needs assessment, goals/objectives, and a plan to evaluate project outcomes. <p>This must be completed prior to the commencement of the 14-week doctoral capstone experience. The doctoral capstone must be started after completion of all coursework and Level II fieldwork</p>
D.1.4.	<p>Document that the process for ensuring valid written agreements between the organization and the program are in effect prior to and for the duration of the capstone experience. Ensure that there is a valid plan for the individual doctoral capstone experience that, at a minimum, includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualized, specific doctoral capstone experience objectives • Plans for evaluation, supervision, and mentoring • Responsibilities of all parties <p>The agreement must be signed by all parties.</p>
D.1.5.	Require that the length of the doctoral capstone experience be a minimum of 14 weeks’ full-time, and a minimum of 32 hours per week. This may be completed on a part-time basis as agreed upon by the organization and must be consistent with the individualized specific objectives and capstone project. This must be equivalent in length to 14 fulltime weeks of at least 32 hours per week. The program must have a mechanism to document that the students meet the requirements for capstone length. Prior fieldwork or work experience may not be substituted for this doctoral capstone experience.
D.1.6.	Ensure completion and dissemination of an individual doctoral capstone project that relates to the doctoral capstone experience and demonstrates synthesis of in-depth knowledge in the focused area of study.
D.1.7.	Document a formal evaluation mechanism for objective assessment of the student’s performance during and at the completion of the doctoral capstone

Procedures & Policies

The Process

The Doctoral Mentorship 1 (OTH 6906) course will be held in the spring semester of year 2. This course provides the foundational work for development of the 14-week Capstone Experience (OTH6985) and Doctoral Capstone Project (OTH 6911). Students will engage in an exploration of their interest area(s) for the capstone experience and related capstone project. Students create a professional development plan with an initial draft of learning objectives for the capstone focused on developing in-depth exposure (beyond a generalist level) to an area of interest in occupational therapy.

The Doctoral Mentorship 2 (OTH 6904) course will be online/asynchronous in the summer semester of year 2. Opportunities for live interaction with the instructor/Doctoral Capstone Coordinator will be provided through Canvas. This course will provide students with opportunities to further engage in an examination of their interest area(s) for the capstone experience and related capstone project. Students will develop learning objectives for the capstone focused on developing in-depth exposure (beyond a generalist level). During this course, assignment of Capstone faculty mentors and site locations for the Capstone Experience begin. Students will have the opportunity to offer three suggestions for a doctoral faculty mentor in the Department of occupational therapy based on the mentor's expertise match with the prospective project.

The Doctoral Mentorship 3 (OTH 6908) course will be held online during the first 7 weeks of spring semester of year 3. Students will complete a literature review in preparation for the capstone project. Students will collaborate with their assigned faculty mentor and site mentor to start developing goals and objectives for the Capstone Experience. Concurrently, in OTH 6724 Program Evaluation & Development, students will develop a related needs assessment for their capstone.

The Doctoral Mentorship 4 (OTH 6909) course will be held online during the second 7 weeks of spring semester of year 3. This course builds on the work in OTH 6908, Doctoral Mentorship 3, for completion of a Capstone Project proposal. Early in this course, the student will need to confirm if institutional review board (IRB) approval will be required for their Capstone Project. The Capstone Project proposal, the Capstone Experience week-by-week plan, and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the student's individualized specific goals and evaluation plan will all be completed, approved, and signed by all parties during this course.

The Capstone Experience (OTH 6985) course provides a 14-week in-depth exposure in an area of interest within the occupational therapy scope of practice. The experience will start in mid-April and go through July, allowing one week at the end for make-up time and the following week for dissemination and graduation in early August. This course is an integral part of the program's curriculum design and includes an in-depth experience in one or more of the following: clinical practice skills, research skills, administration, leadership, program and policy development, advocacy, or education. A completed and signed Memorandum of Understanding is a prerequisite for this course. Concurrent registration in OTH 6911 Doctoral Capstone Project is required (ACOTE® 2023, D.1.0).

The Capstone Project, (OTH6911) course provides occupational therapy students with an in-depth knowledge in a designated area of interest. This course is an integral part of the program's curriculum design and relates to the in-depth Capstone experience (OTH 6895) in one or more of the following: Clinical skills, Research skills, Administration, Program development and evaluation, Policy development, Advocacy, Education, or Leadership.

By the end of the course the student will complete a capstone project paper and a poster demonstrating synthesis of in-depth knowledge in the focused area of study. The Capstone project will be disseminated by a public poster presentation on campus after completion of the Capstone Experience. Concurrent registration in OTH 6985 Doctoral Capstone Experience is required (ACOTE® 2023, D.1.0).

Memorandum of Understanding

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will serve as a key document during the planning process and during the implementation of the Capstone Experience and the Capstone Project. This document will

include individualized specific objectives, plans for supervision and mentoring, and responsibilities and signatures of all parties. A copy (or link) of the mentors' CV or resume that reflects expertise in the student's area of focus will be submitted with the MOU during the planning process. The MOU will also serve as plan for mentoring/supervision and the midterm and final evaluation for the Capstone Experience.

Addendum: Any changes to the MOU once the capstone experience starts require a meeting with the DCC to discuss potential changes. If changes are then indicated the student is provided with the addendum form to update and obtain approval signatures from all parties. This must be completed within the first 2 weeks of the capstone experience. In extraordinary circumstances the MOU addendum can be changed later.

Relationship to Level I and Level II Fieldwork

Prerequisites for the Capstone Experience include successful completion of Level I and Level II fieldwork experiences. No part of fieldwork (or work experience) may be counted towards the Capstone Experience requirements.

Procedure for Choosing Doctoral Capstone Experience Site

Students are provided with multiple resources to assist them in making their selection, including two capstone fairs, information from previous students, materials sent from the sites, and information obtained from site visits by the Doctoral Capstone Coordinator (DCC). A minimum of one individual advising session with the DCC is required to assist in the process.

Sites will be assigned on an individual basis as students identify an area of interest during the Doctoral Mentorship 2 course. Final decisions on placements are made after a collaborative discussion on student/site fit. Typically, sites require an interview. Once assigned, all placements will be final and **not** open to change without a hardship request made to the Progression & Review Committee and approval from the Doctoral Capstone Coordinator and Program Director with input from the faculty and site mentors as applicable.

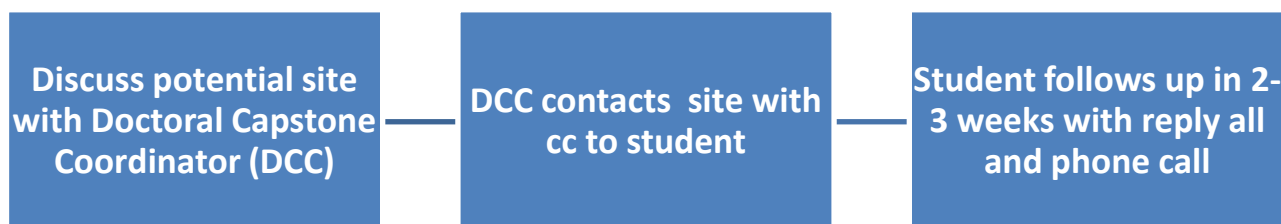
The hardship request process is designed to meet the occasional need of a student for whom the selection process would prove disruptive to family responsibilities and would result in the student's probable discontinuation of their schooling. Appeals/hardship requests for special consideration in placement are based on demonstrated need for one of the following reasons: dependent care, extreme personal issues, and students with disabilities who have registered with the Office of Students with Disabilities and have a documented need for placement accommodations. Students will be informed of the dates of the process, generally during the second semester of the second year of the program. Decisions are made subject to the availability of capstone sites. All decisions of the committee will be final. Appeals cannot be made for financial reasons. Requests found to be made on false claims will be overturned and denied, and the student may be dismissed from the program for this unethical behavior. If not dismissed, students who falsify claims will be placed in any remaining site at the conclusion of the assignment process.

Contact/Communication with Sites

All prospective and contracted sites are considered a resource of the University of Florida, Department of Occupational Therapy, not the individual student. Students are NOT to contact a Doctoral Capstone Experience site or site mentor without prior approval from the Doctoral Capstone Coordinator. Once assigned and confirmed to a site, students will be responsible for maintaining regular contact with the site.

The flow chart below will guide the communication policy with sites PRIOR to confirmed experience placements.

Figure 2. Flowchart of Capstone Site Placement Process



Evaluation and Grading Procedures

Students receive a letter grade for completion of all the Doctoral Mentorship courses. Grading rubrics for the assignments will be shared with students during the related Doctoral Mentorship courses through the Canvas course site.

Students receive a letter grade for completion of the Capstone Project, OTH6911. Grading rubrics for the project presentation and paper will be shared with students during the Doctoral Mentorship 4 course and will be available on the course website. A week two and midterm report on progress will be required. Students will present their project at the doctoral experiential site during week 14. The primary dissemination and defense of the individual Capstone Project will occur on campus. Additional dissemination will be determined in collaboration with the faculty mentor and site mentor. On-campus attendance, at the end of the course, is required to present and defend the Capstone Project. Capstone Experience, OTH 6985, is graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory (S/U) basis. A draft copy of the Capstone Experience evaluation form will be shared with students during OTH 6906: Doctoral Mentorship I and is available on the course Canvas site. The evaluation will include the plan for supervision/mentorship and individualized specific goals. A follow-up report will be due during the second week to the Doctoral Capstone Coordinator and faculty mentor. Evaluation of student performance at midterm and during the final week of the experience is required by the Department of Occupational Therapy (ACOTE® D.1.7). Students will also be required to complete an evaluation of the doctoral capstone experience.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students requesting classroom or academic accommodations must first register with the Dean of Students Office/Disabilities Research Center. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting

accommodation. For information about the policies and procedures for accommodations see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc>. Contact the DRC at 352-392-8565, by e-mail at accessuf@dso.ufl.edu or the DRC office at 0001 Building 0020 (Reid Hall).

Absences

See OTD Student manual for absentee policy for all Doctoral Mentorship courses. The Capstone Experience is expected to be a full time 14-week experience. **Any time missed due to illness or other events will need to be made-up.** Both the site mentor and Doctoral Capstone Coordinator must be notified of any missed time, ideally prior to the reporting time the day of the absence.

Regardless of the reason for missing an experience day, students must document their plan to complete the experience activities they will miss or have missed using their week-by-week plan and emailing it to the DCC. Anytime not made up may delay graduation.

Holidays

Students at clinical sites or community sites that are open on holidays will be expected to follow the schedule set by their site, which may mean being on site on holidays. Absences for religious holidays require notice to the DCC and site mentor **PRIOR** to the start of the Capstone Experience. Please note that several holidays occur during the Doctoral Capstone Experience. Arrangements for holidays that sites will be closed should be made **PRIOR** to the start of the Capstone Experience. This may involve completing the capstone experience a week later.

Full or Part Time Status and Hours

The Capstone Experience is expected to be completed on a full-time basis over the course of one semester. Full time is defined by the site. Any exceptions to this will require completion of a hardship form submitted with justification and supporting documentation to the Progression and Review Committee. Requests for exceptions will then need to be approved by the OTD program director, Doctoral Capstone Coordinator, faculty mentor and site mentor.

Fourteen weeks (or the equivalent of if part time) of at least 32 hours per week are required during the experience, students maintain a time tracking log to document hours and submit the log as requested by the Doctoral Capstone Coordinator. If full time at a site is 40 hours the student is expected to have a 40 hour a week experience. All students submit a completed and signed time tracking log at the end of the experience.

Level I and Level II fieldwork hours and previous work experience cannot be substituted for any part of the Capstone Experience (ACOTE® 2023 D.1.5).

Completion

Fieldwork Level II placements, the capstone experience, and the capstone project must be successfully completed within 18 months of completing didactic campus-based coursework.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Capstone Projects that may involve research will need: (1) prior approval from the faculty mentor (early in the Doctoral Mentorship 4 course) and (2) IRB approval no later than midterm of the Doctoral

Mentorship 4 course. The IRB office will make the decision if an IRB is required and should be contacted by the student early in the Doctoral Mentorship 4 course.

University regulations require that all research projects involving human or animal subjects be reviewed even if the research does not involve experimentation, if it is purely observational, or if it appears totally harmless. In addition, projects must be reviewed, whether or not they are funded. Research that will involve collecting data using human or animal subjects must be approved before the project begins by one of three boards outside of the department.

The *Institutional Review Board (IRB)* reviews all research involving humans. For further information on these offices see www.irb.ufl.edu. The site also contains all necessary forms.

UF Health students may be required to complete The Quality Improvement Project Registry (QIPR) for UF Health quality improvement projects. <https://qipr.ese.ufhealth.org/approver/>. Information on the distinction between quality improvement and IRB is also located on this website. Completing QIRP will assist in determine if IRB is indicated.

Writing Style

Doctoral Mentorship and Doctoral Capstone Project papers for the Department of Occupational Therapy are to be written according to the American Psychological Association (APA) Style. Students are responsible for obtaining access to the information in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (latest edition). The University Reading and Writing Center, located within the Teaching Center in SW Broward Hall, offers free services to staff and students. The center's office is open 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday (392-2010).

Authorship

Dissemination of the Capstone Project is an important part of doctoral level work. The Department of Occupational Therapy strongly encourages students to submit their work for publication and/or presentation. Submitting a manuscript is often dependent upon contributions of a group of individuals, including advisors, committee members, and external experts. It is critical that contributions and authorship be discussed openly from the outset and throughout the project.

An authorship discussion and agreement should take place during the Doctoral Mentorship 4 course.

Primary roles for authorship include the following:

- Conceptualization of the study
- Design of the study
- Data analysis, interpretation, collection
- Writing the manuscript

Major Editing of the Manuscript

The student, faculty mentor, site mentor, and other applicable persons will achieve consensus about authorship, including who will be considered an author, and order of authors. Typically, the student will serve as first author, and the faculty project mentor will serve as co- or second author. The Doctoral Capstone Coordinator may also be an author as determined by authorship guidelines. The Authorship order can also be decided alphabetically, by lottery, or through some other type of negotiation.

The persons in the original collaborative relationship should set a schedule to review the original commitment, a time limit of when the partnership ends, and/or a proposed date for termination of the scholarly activity. At the time of review, authors who are no longer available may be removed from the document and the remaining authors may agree upon other changes. If the student has not submitted the manuscript for publication and/or presentation after six months following graduation, the co- or second author may take the first author place to pursue publication and/or presentation.

The form for use in confirming authorship will be available to the students during OTH 6909, Doctoral Mentorship 4. This form will be required to be submitted prior to the start of the doctoral capstone experience and providing any future updates to all authors.

Problems during Capstone Experience

Occasionally, a student may have difficulties during the Doctoral Capstone Experience. Safety is of primary concern and the school will intervene if problems arise. Each case will be handled on an individual basis and follow specified procedures. The purpose of this policy is to outline a sequential procedure for instructional and/or disciplinary interventions in the event of unsatisfactory student performance during doctoral capstone placements. The intent is to encourage early intervention with an emphasis on collaborative problem solving to assure successful student performance. The procedure usually begins in sequence but may vary depending upon the nature of the unsatisfactory performance.

- 1) The site mentor reports unsatisfactory performance to the student and Capstone Coordinator upon identification. The site mentor and DCC counsel the student on corrective actions. A learning contract is established.
- 2) A Learning Contract will be developed jointly by the student, site mentor and DCC, the faculty mentor may also be involved. The learning contract will include, but is not limited to: a description of the problem; suggested learning strategies; outcome measures; time lines; and consequences of success or failure to meet requirements set forth in the plan.
- 3) The site mentor monitors student progress and provides formal (written) and informal feedback to the student and DCC for the duration of the Capstone experience, at intervals established in the learning contract.
- 4) If the learning contract fails for any reason, the DCC and Program Director will discuss the issues, implement a plan, and decide the outcome. If indicated, the issue will be referred to the Academic Performance Review Committee.

Please contact the DCC if you would like feedback at any time. This is a confidential relationship unless you report something that is mandated by law to report. The DCC will only reveal issues you discussed with your site mentor (in the event of problems) with your consent.

Problems which cannot be resolved between the student and the site mentor should be presented to the DCC. Involving more people in a situation may lead to the identification of more alternatives. Please notify the UF OT DCC immediately if you or your site mentor have concerns about your performance. Involving the DCC earlier in the process may provide a better result.

Withdrawal

Leaving a Doctoral Capstone Experience site without prior notification and a receipt of written or direct telephone response from the Capstone Coordinator or the Program Director is viewed as a serious

infraction of professional ethics and is considered abandonment of one's professional responsibilities to the clients (if applicable) and the site. The Progression and Review Committee will review any case of abandonment and consider consequences, not limited to failure of the Capstone Experience and ineligibility to petition for return to the program.

Outline of Responsibilities

Student Responsibilities

Students are responsible for independently arranging for and financing their housing and transportation for the Doctoral Capstone Experience. Changes in marital status, financial considerations, or changed housing arrangements are not considered adequate grounds for changing placements. Additionally, students are responsible for the following:

- 1) Maintaining regular contact with site mentor and faculty mentor once assigned
- 2) Obtaining and providing a copy CV (resume) of site mentor uploaded to EXATT (the capstone experience management system) or as a link on MOU.
- 3) Completing student requirements (background check/fingerprints/etc.)
- 4) Completing a needs assessment and literature review prior to the Capstone Experience
- 5) Collaborating with site and faculty mentor on individualized specific goals/objectives, evaluation, and supervision plan for Capstone Experience and Capstone Project
- 6) Notifying the Doctoral Capstone Coordinator and mentors of any absences or concerns about performance
- 7) Completing the 14-week full time Capstone Experience and time tracking log.
- 8) Disseminating an individual doctoral level Capstone Project that relates to the Capstone Experience
- 9) Evaluating of the site and site mentor to help continue to improve educational outcomes
- 10) Writing letters of appreciation to the site mentor and applicable site administrators
- 11) Compliance with OTD student manual policies, College of Public Health and Health Professions, and University of Florida policies
 - a. [UF Regulations 6C1-1.008](#)
 - b. [Student Conduct Code](#)

Faculty Mentor

- 1) Collaborating with the student and capstone coordinator during Doctoral Mentorship 3 and 4 courses, including providing expert content feedback on course assignments.
- 2) Optional: grading of the literature review during Doctoral Mentorship 3
- 3) Optional: attendance via zoom to listen to project proposal during Doctoral Mentorship 4.
- 4) Collaborating with the Doctoral Capstone Coordinator, site mentor and student on learning objectives for Capstone Experience
- 5) Signing the MOU to demonstrate collaborative agreement with the student's individualized objectives and plan.
- 6) Managing the Capstone Project during OTH 6911
- 7) Assuring alignment with the curriculum
- 8) Collaborating with the site and student
- 9) Providing feedback on and grading the Capstone Project

Site Mentor

- 1) Collaborating with student, doctoral capstone coordinator, and faculty mentor
- 2) Collaborating on individualized specific objectives and plan for supervision
- 3) Signing the MOU (in early April) to demonstrate agreement with the student's individualized objectives and plan.
- 4) Providing onsite mentoring of the student (and supervision as state licensure laws & insurance requirements are applicable)
- 5) Providing project and experience feedback to student based on your expertise
- 6) Evaluating and assessing student performance at midterm and final
- 7) Verifying the student time log during the experience.

Doctoral Capstone Coordinator

- 1) Assuring compliance with ACOTE® D standards
- 2) Serving as the instructor for the (four) Doctoral Mentorship courses and the Doctoral Capstone Experience OTH 6985.
- 3) Initiating contact with clinical sites
- 4) Advising students on site selection
- 5) Confirming willingness/commitment from site
- 6) Obtaining/monitoring University of Florida legal contracts for the doctoral capstone experience
- 7) Training/mentoring of site mentors
- 8) Training/mentoring faculty mentors
- 9) Collaboration with content mentors
- 10) Tracking paperwork logistics (signatures on MOU)
- 11) Monitoring student requirements (background check/fingerprints/etc.)
- 12) Signing the MOU to demonstrate agreement with the student's individualized objectives and plan
- 13) Collaborating on any student issues for experience
- 14) Collaborating with site-on-site issues
- 15) Serving as a faculty mentor as assigned

Forms

- Absentee Form
- Authorship Form
- Capstone Project Proposal Template
- Doctoral Experience Time Tracking Log
- Hardship Application (same form as used for fieldwork)
- Memorandum of Understanding
- Memorandum of Understanding Addendum (only available after meeting with DCC)
- Planning Forms 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 (OTH 6906 & OTH 6904, OTH 6908, OTH 6909)
- Student Commitment to Site
- Student Evaluation of Doctoral Experience

FAQ's

1. Can I change my MOU after the Capstone Experience starts? Yes, within the 1st 2 weeks. See page 7 of this manual.
2. What if I need time off?
 - a. Complete the absentee form
 - b. Make sure you will still meet the accreditation guidelines of 14 weeks full time
 - c. More than 2 days (cumulative) of absences will require being at the site an additional week.
 - d. Know that this could potentially delay graduation.
3. Can I drive clients? NO
4. Can I get paid on my capstone? Maybe, all work has to be related to the MOU/capstone experience goals. Any payment provided must be in the form of a stipend. At this point we do not have any paid/stipend capstones. Requests for this are required to be approved by the Progression & Review.
5. Can I change my capstone site placement after it has been set up? Once assigned, all placements will be final and **not** open to change without a hardship request made to the Progression & Review Committee and approval from the Doctoral Capstone Coordinator and Program Director with input from the faculty and site mentors as applicable. See page 7 of this manual.