The postgraduate capstone experience: Negotiating the pedagogical tensions

Jacqueline Mowbray
Lecturer, School of Law
University of Sydney
Jacqueline.mowbray@sydney.edu.au

Abstract

In designing a capstone experience, legal educators may encounter a number of tensions between competing pedagogical imperatives and conflicting capstone principles. Should we focus on teaching content or should we focus on developing skills? Should we emphasise integration and consolidation of knowledge, or transition and the development of professional identity? Should we encourage specialisation of knowledge and skills or should we be offering a broader view that takes account of context and diversity? This article considers how these tensions may be revealed, negotiated and managed, using a case study of a postgraduate capstone unit in international law. In doing so, the article adds to the literature on capstone units in law, which has to date focused on the undergraduate experience, and demonstrates that the existing work on capstones can be successfully applied in the postgraduate context. The article further argues that postgraduate units may offer particularly useful vehicles for exposing the pedagogical tensions involved in designing a capstone experience and experimenting with techniques for managing those tensions.

Introduction

Over the past two decades there has been increased interest in the experience of final year university students and, in particular, in the concept of "capstone" units (Durel, 1993; Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998; Hauhart & Grahe, 2014; Heinemann, 1997). Although this development in the broader learning design literature was slow to be taken up within the discipline of law, there is now a distinct and growing body of work dedicated to exploring the philosophies, principles and best practice of capstone units in Australian law schools (Kift, Field, & Wells, 2008; Kift, et al., 2013; McNamara, et al., 2012).

To date, however, this literature has focused on the capstone experience for undergraduate students. This article considers the challenges and possibilities of developing a capstone experience for students completing *postgraduate* coursework using a case study of an international law capstone unit taught at Sydney Law School. The unit, *The State and Global Governance*, was designated a capstone for a specialist Masters qualification, the Master of Law and International Development, and was the first capstone to be introduced into the University of Sydney's postgraduate law program. The way in which this unit functioned in practice therefore offers a number of insights into the use of capstones at postgraduate level, and the potential for extending the use of capstones into other postgraduate programs.

In particular, in implementing the capstone experience through this unit, those of us responsible for the program design found that we repeatedly came up against tensions or conflicts between competing pedagogical imperatives, familiar from the literature on capstones and on legal education generally. Should we focus on teaching content or should we focus on developing skills? Should we place increased emphasis on specialisation of knowledge and skills or should we be offering a broader view that takes account of context and diversity? At the same time, we found that practical implementation of the capstone unit revealed conflicts between a number of established "capstone principles." The capstone principles referred to in this paper arise from research by Kift, et al. (2013) wherein these authors stipulate six key interrelated principles for the design of good capstone experiences. The six principles are: transition, integration and closure, engagement, diversity, assessment, and evaluation. For example, a focus on "transitioning" students to post-study careers can conflict with the goal of "integration" of knowledge when students keen to craft the capstone experience to their future ambitions lose sight of how to draw on what they have already learned.

This article considers the different ways in which these tensions or conflicts were revealed, negotiated and managed over three years of teaching the capstone unit in question. In doing so, it offers a number of insights into curriculum design for capstone experiences generally, and for postgraduate capstone units in particular.

Context: The postgraduate capstone experience

A capstone unit is traditionally understood as "a crowning course or experience coming at the end of a sequence of courses with the specific objective of integrating a body of relatively fragmented knowledge into a unified whole" (Durel, 1993, p. 223). This article is based on a case study of a single postgraduate capstone unit in international law. It therefore replicates the methodology of most of the literature on capstones which, as Van Acker and Bailey (2011) noted, focuses largely on "studies of single courses" (p. 72). However, it also extends and builds on that literature which, as noted, generally considers only undergraduate programs (Hauhart & Grahe, 2014), by focusing on the postgraduate capstone experience.

This focus on the postgraduate capstone experience seems warranted for a number of reasons. The first is that the position of postgraduates differs from that of undergraduates in several ways which assume importance in the context of the capstone literature. Unlike undergraduates, postgraduate law students are generally already established in their careers and are undertaking postgraduate study either to progress their existing careers or to enable them to change career direction. As a result, these students already have the "professional identity" which undergraduate capstones seek to develop (McNamara, et al., 2011), at least to some extent. However, questions of how to "transition" to alternative professional pathways, a key goal of the capstone experience (McNamara, et al., 2011), may be even more important to these postgraduates than to undergraduates. At the same time, the professional pathways sought by postgraduate students are likely to be more diverse and specialised than those sought by undergraduate students. This is perhaps particularly pronounced within the field of international law, where there is no clear career path following graduation. In addition, the student body is itself likely to be much more diverse than at undergraduate level. This raises directly the issue of how to accommodate different forms of diversity, another of the key capstone principles (Kift, et al., 2013). Finally, postgraduate law degrees are shorter, often significantly shorter, than the undergraduate law degree. This creates both challenges and opportunities for curriculum design, and for the design of capstone experiences in particular, given that a capstone is designed to build on knowledge from previous units.

Secondly, while the postgraduate experience differs from the undergraduate in these ways, capstones within the postgraduate program can be seen to be important for the same reasons as undergraduate capstones. The "final year experience" before graduation, for both postgraduates and undergraduates, is characterised by high expectations of students, the special needs of students in transition to new professional pathways, the need to make the most of our final opportunity with

students, and the need to focus on students as our future alumni (Gardner, et al., 1998), all of which point towards the importance of capstones. Yet in spite of these imperatives, curriculum design for postgraduates, including capstones, is often neglected within law, where the traditional Master of Laws is generally offered as a smorgasbord of elective subjects from which students can make almost unlimited choices. This minimalist approach to curriculum design, however, may no longer be appropriate given the increasing introduction of specialised postgraduate programs in law, such as Master of Commercial Law, or, as in the case study described in this article, a Master of Law and International Development. Against this background, consideration of the particularities of the postgraduate capstone experience assumes importance.

If the imperatives driving the creation of postgraduate capstone experiences mirror those driving the development of undergraduate capstones, we might also expect the issues and problems encountered in implementing a capstone at both levels to be the same. Certainly fundamental questions of how to transition students from study to future career (McNamara, et al., 2011), how to help students "find connections between their academic experience and future plans" (Gardner et al., 1998, p. 6), how to consolidate students' knowledge (Kift, et al., 2008), and how to enhance students' ability to engage with diversity (Kift, et al., 2013) are key features of capstone design at both levels. This represents a third reason for considering the postgraduate capstone experience, namely that it has the potential to offer important insights into the design of capstone programs generally. Indeed, as this article will demonstrate, the particularities of the postgraduate experience mean that some of the difficulties associated with capstone design, specifically the tensions between competing pedagogical imperatives, may arise more acutely in the postgraduate context. As a result, postgraduate capstones may make for better case studies with more potential to illuminate issues with the operation and design of capstone units. Further, the literature encourages us to focus not on capstone units in isolation, but on the whole "final year experience" (Kift, et al., 2008), thus emphasising curriculum design generally. Postgraduate programs provide a useful model for exploring how this might work, because many postgraduate programs are only one year long. Changes to the curriculum can be introduced and tested more quickly and easily in this context. Postgraduate programs also have more freedom to experiment with curricula, free from the constraints of professional requirements such as the "Priestley 11."

Against this background, the next section provides an overview of the process of curriculum design for the Master of Law and International Development and its capstone units.

Master of Law and International Development

The Master of Law and International Development (MLID), a specialised Masters program, was developed at Sydney Law School around 2011 in response to demand for a dedicated postgraduate program for students who were interested in using their legal knowledge in the field of international development, that is, in using law to improve economic and social conditions in developing countries. The MLID was established with the following key aims:

- To consider the theory and practice of international development, with a focus on the role of law in that process.

- To focus on the implementation of the law rather than just the law itself.

- To accommodate different legal backgrounds and specialisations. The students undertaking this program would come from a range of specialised backgrounds, with different legal interests (for example, in tax law, human rights law, environmental law, health law etc), but with a common interest in how their specific area of law could be used in the context of development work.

- To open professional pathways for students interested in pursuing or furthering careers in the field of international development.

Achieving these aims required careful curriculum design. Particularly challenging was the question of how to balance the specialised backgrounds and legal interests of the students with their general need to understand how law, of all types, could be deployed in the context of international development. One way of doing this was to allow students a number of electives in which to pursue their individual legal interests, followed by a capstone to bring together the essential core coverage of content and build on students' specialisations.

We were mindful that, for this capstone model to work effectively, the rest of the curriculum needed to be appropriately designed (Kift, et al., 2008). Drawing on Bruner's (1960) concept of the "spiral curriculum" in which the curriculum is designed such that later units involve students "revisiting previously learnt material and extending it in some way" (Kift, et al., 2008, p. 153), we therefore developed a program design which allowed for electives but also included a large component of compulsory prerequisites. Once students had completed the compulsory and elective prerequisites, they could choose from four or five capstone units. The capstone units offered took different forms, most of which are well-established in the capstone literature: work-integrated learning, in the form of practical field schools, in which students travelled to Nepal (Saul & Baghoomians, 2012) or Southeast Asia, to experience development work first hand; an extended research project; or practical training, in the form of a project management course run by the Business School. In addition, we offered a standard, taught unit, *The State and Global Governance*, and sought, through various techniques, to ensure that this unit functioned effectively as a capstone. It is our experience with this unit that is the focus of the remainder of this article.

Course design: balancing pedagogical imperatives

In the course of developing *The State and Global Governance* as a capstone unit, it became obvious that we had to confront a number of tensions or conflicts between different aims of the capstone experience and, indeed, of teaching generally. These conflicts between competing pedagogical imperatives are familiar from the literature on capstones and on legal education more broadly. However, the way in which they played out in the context of this particular unit brought about insightful reflection from the teaching team involved in the designing of the unit. This case study is offered as a useful example for exploring practical issues associated with the implementation of capstone units generally, and postgraduate capstones in particular.

The following sections discuss the three primary tensions revealed during the curriculum design process and add a new pedagogical dimension to thinking about capstones. The three conflicts are:

* teaching *skills* versus teaching *content*;

* focusing on *integration* and consolidation of knowledge versus encouraging *transition* and development of professional identity; and

* emphasising *specialisation* versus taking account of *context and diversity*.

Skills versus content

The question of the extent to which legal educators should focus on content ("what lawyers need to know") versus skills ("what lawyers need to be able to do") has been the subject of considerable discussion in the literature (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2000; Kift, 2003). The debate is, of course, ongoing. Late last year, for example, the Law Admissions Consultative Committee released a discussion paper, *Review of Academic Requirements for Admission to the Legal Profession*, which raises anew the question of whether reforms to the Priestley 11 (that is, the content basis of legal education) are required in light of changes in legal practice. In general terms, however, since the 2000 report of the Australian Law Reform Commission exhorted law schools to question their "solitary preoccupation with the detailed content of numerous bodies of substantive law" (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2000, para 2.82), there has been a shift

within Australian legal education to give more emphasis to the development of skills, both generic and legally specific. This shift finds particular expression in the literature on capstones, which emphasises the importance of capstones in enabling students to develop the skills they will need in their future careers (McNamara, et al., 2012; Van Acker & Bailey, 2011). Nonetheless, the question of how to strike the balance between teaching content and teaching skills remains a live one.

To add to this tension, there is also division within the capstone literature about the question of whether new content can be introduced in a capstone experience. Some authors suggest that no new content should be introduced in a capstone unit (Bailey, Oliver, & Townsend, 2007, p. 66). On the other hand, there are authors who argue that lecturers may need to introduce some "entirely new theoretical material" (Heinemann, 1997, pp. 4-5) in order to achieve the aims of a capstone experience.

In designing the capstone unit *The State and Global Governance,* we found that this tension between teaching content (including new content) and teaching skills arises particularly acutely in the postgraduate context. This is because postgraduate degrees are shorter and contain fewer compulsory units than undergraduate programs, thus limiting the content which teachers can be sure that students have acquired before commencing the capstone. At the same time, as noted above, skills which will open professional pathways following completion of the degree are of particular importance to postgraduate students, many of whom are already established in a professional career and are looking to develop additional skills to enable them to pursue or change careers. In the case of *The State and Global Governance*, this meant that while the structure of the program urged us to include content, our concern to address the needs of our students compelled us towards a focus on skills.

Against this background, and the ambivalence in the capstone literature regarding the introduction of new content, we initially chose to focus on skills, with content used only as a vehicle for developing professional competencies. So, for example, when considering the problems associated with large-scale development projects, we chose not to focus on teaching development theory but, rather, designed a practical activity which would enable students to analyse development projects themselves and identify which were problematic (in the sense that, for example, the projects would exclude or disadvantage certain groups, or might have unintended consequences with negative impacts on social development). We therefore gave students actual World Bank project documents – proposals for Bank loans to finance major infrastructure projects – and asked them to analyse the proposals, using questions such as: Who wins and who loses if this project is carried out? Is this project likely to have unintended consequences? Who has been consulted in the planning of this project?

To our surprise, the majority of students were unable to identify the problems that might arise from the proposed projects. For the most part, they could not see past the positive spin placed on these projects in the proposal documents and were seduced by what might be termed "World Bank development speak." This was unexpected given that these students had undertaken the compulsory units on law and development for the MLID and were, in some cases, practitioners with significant experience in the development field.

The results from this task provided the teaching team with a number of insights into the potential challenges that arise when addressing tensions in capstone designs. In the first instance, it underscored the importance of engaging more complex thinking about how to ensure our students had learnt what we thought we were teaching them in the compulsory and core units of the MLID. Although it is acknowledged that these issues arise for any course design, the competing tensions between focusing on content whilst addressing the needs of postgraduate students means this issue was especially pertinent for this unit. Secondly, it emphasised the need for us to make "explicit connections … between the various parts of the curriculum" (Van Acker & Bailey, 2011, p. 73) to ensure students connected the loose strands of their learning into a more cohesive whole (the principle of integration) before undertaking these later tasks. It also revealed an interesting

misconception held by the teaching team – we had unwittingly assumed students, as postgraduates with established professional careers and professional identities, would already have established a level of sophistication for problem solving.

Upon reflection, we decided to allocate time in the capstone unit for revisiting some of the core concepts and principles covered in earlier units and demonstrating how these could be applied in the context of a critical analysis of large-scale development projects. Therefore our initial intention to focus on skills needed adjustment by acknowledging the importance of content to underpin students' abilities to successfully address the skills task required of them. Our reflection also considered questions of whole-of-curriculum design and how we could enhance the content students were exposed to in earlier units so as to prepare them more thoroughly for the capstone experience. This iterative and reflective process mirrors an action research cycle favoured in education research.

In further offerings of this unit, we found that these changes helped students get more out of the practical exercise. However, we also found that, to optimise learning outcomes, we needed to teach students certain specific (and often new) content before commencing the activity. In particular, we needed to introduce students to the literature setting out a critical approach to large-scale development projects, to enable students to develop the tools and techniques needed to identify oversights and problems with development projects. Having covered this new content, we were then able to use the practical exercise to develop students' skills and consolidate their knowledge with much more success. This suggests a further and important insight into capstone design, namely that Kift and others are right to conclude that "the notion from the literature that no new material should be introduced in a capstone experience … [is] too limiting" (Kift, et al., 2013, p. 26). In fact, used in the right way, the introduction of new content can be crucial to delivering an effective capstone experience.

Integration versus transition

Integration (or closure) and transition are two key principles of capstone design (Kift, et al., 2013). A capstone should support *integration* of students' learning, by drawing together existing knowledge and skills, "integrating a body of relatively fragmented knowledge into a unified whole" (Durel, 1993, p. 223). Associated with this aim of integration is the aim of closure, the idea that a capstone should give students a sense of completion and finality (McNamara, et al., 2012, p. 2). At the same time, however, the capstone experience should assist students with the *transition* from study to the workplace and/or further training (Bailey, et al., 2007). In particular, the literature emphasises that capstone units should enable students to begin to develop a sense of professional identity (McNamara, et al., 2011). As noted above, this may be of particular importance in the postgraduate context.

In broad terms then, a capstone unit should support students in both looking backwards (integration) and looking forwards (transition). In Durel's (1993) words, the capstone experience is one "through which … students both look back over their … curriculum in an effort to make sense of that experience, and look forward to a life by building on that experience" (p. 223).

The literature suggests a number of techniques that can be used to facilitate the achievement of the goals of integration and transition, including in particular the use of an experiential learning model (Bailey, et al., 2007, p. 67). In other words, the capstone experience should be designed such that it "personally involves students in setting their learning goals and engaging in a learning discovery process" (Kift, et al., 2008, p. 153). This idea now finds expression in the principle that capstone units should promote student *engagement* (Kift, et al, 2013, pp. 52-57). Following this approach, we designed *The State and Global Governance* unit to offer students as much choice as possible in terms of the subject matter of the unit, and especially in the assessment that they undertook. This was also a useful way of managing the diversity of backgrounds and specialisations of students enrolled in the MLID program. As part of this model, we offered students a wide range of

assessment tasks, from which they could choose those most relevant to their own interests and goals. One possible task was a substantial research essay on any topic of a student's choice related to the broad subject of the unit (that is, global governance, or how legal regulation operates at the international level, with effects on development).

For the purposes of this article, there were two interesting points to note about students' responses to this free choice of essay topic. The first was that a large number of students were simply incapable of coming up with their own topic. Upon reflection on the discussions with these students, it became apparent that they felt, in some ways, constrained by the knowledge which they had already acquired through their degree, and were now unable to see how to extend, critique, or apply that knowledge in new ways. In other words, to use Durel's (1993) analogy, these students were so focussed on looking backwards over their degree that they were unable to look forwards to their future.

On the other hand, an equally large number of students saw the free choice of essay subject as an opportunity to pursue topics which can only be described as "random" with virtually no connection to their previous studies or to the subject of this unit. These students pursued topics that interested them professionally but, in doing so, completely lost sight of how to apply their existing knowledge and skills. To use Durel's (1993) words once again, these students were so focussed on looking forwards to the future that they forgot to look backwards as well.

It therefore seemed that the goals of integration and transition, of looking backwards and forwards, were in some ways in conflict. Certainly the tension between these two principles has been noted in the relevant literature (see, for example, McNamara, et al., 2012). Drawing on action research methodology and an iterative and reflective design process, the more we considered this problem, the more we realised that our difficulties with both integration and transition stemmed not from some inherent conflict between the two principles but from other problems with unit design. In particular, we discovered that, in most cases, students were simply not prepared for the task of formulating an appropriate essay topic. Again, this insight revealed our unacknowledged assumption that postgraduate students would have this level of sophistication with their thinking. In offering a free choice of topic, we had created a problem well-recognised in the capstone literature, namely, the emphasis on student independence creates "uncertainties and ambiguities" which students find difficult to respond to without the provision of adequate "scaffolding" and appropriate support for students (Van Acker & Bailey, 2011, p. 73). The problem, then, was not how to strike a balance between integration and transition but how to support students in deciding on essay topics so as to achieve both goals better.

In response, we adopted a range of measures designed to support students in achieving both integration and transition. For students who had been unable to formulate their own essay topic, we gave a sample list of topics for essays. These were often open-ended, requiring students to choose from a range of case studies for at least part of their essay. We therefore gave students guidance on how their previous knowledge could be applied in new ways, while nonetheless encouraging them to make their own choices about how to do so. In this way, we sought to help students "find connections between their academic experience and future plans" (Gardner, et al., 1998, p. 6), and assist them in the process of transitioning from their role as students producing essays on the teacher's demand to development professionals pursuing their own independent interests.

For students who had chosen inappropriate topics for their essays, we explicitly required the essay to draw on materials used in the unit to encourage them to use their existing knowledge as a starting point. We also introduced an initial assessment (worth 15%) which consisted of an abstract and reading list for the final essay. This gave us a chance to comment on students' proposals and direct their research at an early stage before they went too far off track. This was a particularly useful method of helping students with both integration and transition. It also enabled us to develop close personal relationships with the students and their work which assisted us in tailoring the capstone experience to their individual needs.

Through the process of reflecting on the course, the teaching team felt that all these methods of scaffolding had a noticeable and positive impact both on students' results and on students' satisfaction with *The State and Global Governance* as a capstone unit. The next step in the action learning cycle is to evaluate this unit by reviewing course outcome data. By paying closer attention to unit design and by introducing a range of lifebelts to assist students with independent and experiential learning, we were able to achieve the twin goals of integration and transition more effectively, and to manage tension between these two key objectives of the capstone experience.

Specialisation versus context and diversity

The tension between emphasising specialisation of knowledge and skills on the one hand and offering a broader view that takes account of context and diversity on the other is familiar to all educators. However, it is particularly relevant in the context of capstone units which are designed as "crowning" units (Durel, 1993, p. 223) for a particular specialisation while "responding to diversity" is one of the key principles of capstone design (Kift, et al., 2013, pp. 50-52). Diversity here takes on a particular meaning, and within the capstone literature "responding to diversity" has come to be associated primarily with "enabling students to be inclusive of others in professional contexts, as well as ensuring that capstone experiences are designed to be inclusive of all students" (Kift, et al., 2013, p. 51). Diversity thus comes to mean diversity of background, opinion and perspective (Kift, et al., 2013) and the question for teachers is how to shape the content of units to emphasise the accommodation of such diversity. This becomes a particular issue in the postgraduate context where students typically come from a more diverse range of backgrounds at least in terms of professional experience than in undergraduate programs.

As already noted, diversity was a particular issue for the MLID program, given that our students came from a range of different legal and intellectual backgrounds. However our student cohort was also characterised by other forms of diversity. We had many overseas students and students who had very different life experiences from each other. Some were professionals who had been working in the development field for years, others were students who had entered the Masters program directly from completing their undergraduate degrees. The question for us became how to manage this diversity of experience and how to draw usefully on the diversity of student backgrounds, which was an essential part of the program, while nonetheless allowing for specialisation in the particular topic of law and development.

In considering this question, it became apparent that the tension between specialisation and accommodation of diversity related not only to diversity in terms of student background, but also diversity in terms of the content to be covered in the unit itself. Development issues concern not just international law on development (a relatively narrow field) but also a wide range of related fields such as: public international law; private international law; international trade law; human rights; international environmental law; the relationship between international and domestic law; the law relating to international resources and extractive industries; tax regimes; and the law relating to corruption. This was the reason that our program included students with such diverse intellectual backgrounds and interests. But this raised the question: in determining the content of the unit, should we go in depth and focus on international law specifically on development issues, or should we give the broader context within which these issues arise, by covering the diverse areas of law relevant to international development?

The answer, we found, was to focus on specialised content and to hand over to the students for the diversity and context. The unit materials and activities were specialised in that they focused specifically on development theory and issues of international development. However, in working with the materials and performing the activities, we allowed the students to bring their diverse backgrounds to bear on the specialised content. The effect was to combine exposure to context and diversity *with* specialisation, in that student comments and discussion allowed exposure to a broad range of diverse views, while at the same time allowing students to develop a particular specialisation in development theory. By embracing the diversity we had initially seen as

problematic, we naturally overcame some of the conflict between specialisation and offering a broader view that takes account of context.

In order for this to work, however, it is vital to create a constructive class environment focused on discussion. In creating such an environment, we drew on Laurillard's (2002) conversational framework which the capstone literature correctly identifies as an important means of achieving capstone objectives of integration and transition (Kift, et al., 2008, p. 153). Our experience, however, suggests that this will also have important application, in the capstone context, as a means of responding to diversity. Adopting Laurillard's (2002) conversational framework further led us to employ a range of techniques which are favoured in the capstone literature, namely group work, collaboration and class discussion (Bailey, et al., 2007; Kift, et al., 2013). We also used case studies to focus and enliven discussion, particularly contemporary and newsworthy matters, about which we thought all students would have something to say. The choice of case study was important as we needed to identify issues which could draw on students' specialised backgrounds. For example, a case study of the development implications of "Big Data" could be usefully informed by students working in law and technology, intellectual property and tax; while a case study of international commercial surrogacy could draw on the particular expertise of those working in human rights, private international law and health law, among others.

Overall, our experience in managing the conflicts we encountered between specialisation and the accommodation of context and diversity offers two important insights. The first is that, for the purposes of undergraduate capstone design, Kift, et al. (2013) and others have to date focused on diversity in terms of student background, diversity as a capstone principle takes on a new complexion in the context of postgraduate programs. Here the diversity to be accommodated arises also at the level of the subject matter of the unit. In this way, the postgraduate experience highlights the potential conflict between specialisation on the one hand and context and diversity on the other. Secondly, reflecting on our experience, we found Laurillard's (2002) conversational framework useful to manage this conflict, confirming for us the critical role of this approach in this capstone design and implementation.

Conclusion

In designing a capstone experience, as with most course design, legal educators may encounter a number of conflicts or tensions between competing pedagogical imperatives and potentially conflicting capstone principles. This case study has considered how three such conflicts arose and were managed in the context of a postgraduate capstone unit in international law. The results of this case study suggest that tensions between different educational principles are an inevitable feature of course design and especially capstone design, but also that these tensions can be managed using a range of techniques already explored within the capstone literature. Through careful planning and curriculum design, building on techniques such as Bruner's "spiral curriculum" and Laurillard's (2002) conversational framework, and by offering students appropriate scaffolding and lifebelts to support their learning, it is possible to craft a capstone unit which meets the diverse needs of students and achieves the varied aims of the capstone experience.

In exploring these issues through a case study of a postgraduate capstone unit, this article contributes to the growing capstone literature by demonstrating how established capstone principles can be applied in the postgraduate context. This experience has shown not only that the existing work on capstone units in law can be successfully applied in relation to postgraduate programs. It has also suggested that postgraduate units may offer particularly useful vehicles for exposing the pedagogical tensions involved in designing a capstone experience, and experimenting with techniques for managing these tensions. In this way, case studies of postgraduate capstone units have the potential to offer important insights into curriculum design for capstone experiences generally.

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