

*Undergraduate students at Divine Word College spend their final semester taking courses while also researching, writing and preparing their Capstone Project, which includes a formal presentation. It is unlike anything else they do during their time here.*

# Seniors demonstrate lessons learned



Fr. John Szukalski, SVD, Vice President for Academic Affairs, said the Senior Capstone Project is an opportunity for students to integrate their learning through researching and applying knowledge to contemporary relevant issues in their field of interest.

*Fr. John Szukalski, SVD*

“The Capstone is not intended to be anything like a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, although some students might imagine it so! The Capstone is a much more modest and focused endeavor that allows students to spend an entire semester researching and developing a well-defined topic under the guidance of an experienced faculty member,” he said.

While it is certainly demanding, there is much to be learned from every scenario that pushes a person past the point of comfort and the Capstone is no exception.

“For me, this is the most challenging paper I ever had, because throughout four years of college, this was the longest paper,” said Phuc Hong Truong, who graduated in

May with a B.A. in Philosophy. “Dr. (Ron) Condon helped me with my grammar, the overall organization of my paper and offered suggestions.”

The topic of his Capstone was Aristotle on Eudaimonia, or “true happiness” to those of us who are not philosophers.

Phuc said researching and organizing his paper was complex and difficult. He struggled at times to find credible philosophy sources and then connect them in a logical and organized way. “I think these projects help students review what they have already learned in school, learn to write longer papers and practice public speaking in order to prepare them for further studies,” Phuc said.

Sr. Hien Nguyen, LHC, used her Capstone Project to research and



*Sr. Hien Nguyen, LHC*

present on a topic that is of great importance to her congregation back in her home country of Vietnam. It was titled, “A New Approach to Human Formation Program for The Lovers of the Holy Cross of Ba Ria: A Renewal of the Understanding of Self-awareness.”

**During her years of study at DWC, Sr. Hien learned that self-awareness enables an individual to be aware of the people around him or her while showing them respect and appreciation. A quote from Tina Lifford that resonated with her was, “When you know yourself, you are empowered. When you accept yourself, you are invincible.”**



*Phuc Hong Truong*

She selected the topic after discussing her experience at DWC with a superior from her congregation. The undergraduate student was encouraged to explore the aspect of human formation further. Soon it became the spotlight of her congregational plan for 2021-2025 and the subject matter of her Capstone. Sr. Hien said she wanted to do research that could have practical applications for the members of her order. In her research, she explored the ways that women religious can benefit from human formation and personal development.

“Human formation is the foundation for spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation,” she said. “Self-awareness is the first step to personality development and spiritual growth. Self-awareness is important not only for those who are in formation but also for perpetual-vowed members in their ongoing formation.”

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Sr. Hien said part of the reason she selected her Capstone Project topic was because she believes it can help religious

sisters in her congregation balance between apostolic works and spiritual life.

“Self-awareness helps them know their weaknesses and strengths so that they can develop their personal identity, a healthy personality and the skills needed to live harmoniously in community,” she said.

The end-of-semester public presentation allows Senior Capstone students to showcase an aspect of their project with the wider campus community.

“My hope is that students appreciate Capstones less as a feared trial by fire and more as a meaningful culmination of their academic career at Divine Word College,” said Fr. John.

Since graduating with her B.A. in Theology and Religious Studies from DWC in December, Sr. Hien has been studying for her certificate in Spiritual Direction and a Master of Arts in Ministry at St. John’s School of Theology and Seminary in Collegeville, Minnesota. Once she finishes her studies, she plans to return to Vietnam and help with her congregation’s formation program by serving as a spiritual director. She hopes to apply what she’s learned both intellectually and spiritually to help the sisters in her congregation.