

## Annotated Capstone Sub-Genres

### The Introduction

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#### Overview

The Introduction familiarizes your readers with the key components that underpin your Capstone, including the problem or issue that needs to be addressed, the policy response, and your resulting research question(s). It also helps your readers to understand the importance of your research by providing a rationale for why you've undertaken it. According to Professor Thomas Main's "Elements of a Capstone Thesis," you should consider your policy network—"a loose association of more or less expert professionals who follow a public policy topic, debate and discuss it regularly, and in various ways try to influence the direction policy will take"—as the audience for your Capstone. The introduction is the first place where you establish your Capstone's significance to that particular network.

Sometimes the Introduction is also called the "Background" section. As this title suggests, you might also think about what contextual information your readers need to know in order to engage with your research or to understand the history of the problem and/or policy your Capstone addresses. Visual representations of data such as charts and graphs are definitely appropriate. However, you'll also want to keep in mind your policy network readers, who probably already have some familiarity with your topic, and not overload the introduction with unnecessary or overly-detailed explanation.

Unlike an Executive Summary, which can stand alone, an Introduction equips your readers with the information they need to read the rest of your Capstone. While your recommendations might be previewed briefly, for example, your emphasis is on setting the stage for the more in-depth analysis that is to come in your Literature Review, Methodology, and Results sections.

You may end up writing the Introduction early in your process (in the future tense) and then revising it toward the end of your Capstone writing process (in the past tense) in order to take into account any changes. Phrases like "I will study" become "I studied" and so forth. Below is the Introduction to a Marx graduate's Capstone, annotated with key moves made by the writer.

#### Annotated Model Capstone Introduction

From "We Don't Need Ribbon-Cuttings to Have Great Parks: A Review of the NYC Community Parks Initiative Targeted Improvement Program"

In the fall of 2014, Mayor Bill de Blasio and NYC Parks Commissioner Michael Silver announced the Community Parks Initiative (CPI), a plan to target improvements to underserved and needy parks within the five boroughs. This plan is a signature initiative for the de Blasio administration and is focused on increasing equity in the parks system. A 2014 Parks Department analysis of the current NYC parks ecosystem discovered that not all parks are created alike in New York City. The analysis observed that park quality positively

Very brief background statements that provide some context for the Capstone.

correlates with an area's median household income, so as median household income within an area increases, so does the overall park quality within that area. In addition, the Parks department analysis found that 215 parks were severely underfunded in the past 20 years, receiving less than \$250,000 capital investment each. Of these underfunded parks, 25 percent were geographically concentrated in the highest poverty areas in New York City.

The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) attempted to correct this park inequality by spending over \$132 million in 2015 to upgrade parks in high need communities. The CPI funds were set aside for small public parks and playgrounds located in NYC's most densely populated and growing neighborhoods, where there are higher than average concentrations of poverty.

The CPI plan called for coordinated efforts across many DPR divisions. CPI components included: capital investment, extended recreational programs, increased maintenance staffing, and physical park repairs and improvements. The plan also called for DPR to build long-term partnerships with community stakeholders, and help local groups increase their capacity to care for neighborhood parks.

Most of the \$132 million CPI funds were invested in capital renovations for 35 parks. However, the Mayor's office provided \$1.4 million for DPR to hire 70 new staff to deliver recreational programming and increased maintenance in the 55 CPI parks. The City Council also funded \$750,000 in 2015 to support park maintenance. The Mayoral and City Council investments in the CPI program were intended to help DPR deliver immediate improvements to the parks, since DPR's capital reconstruction process takes 3-plus years.

The CPI funding for targeted improvements is interesting because it represents a way for the Parks Department to have an immediate impact on struggling parks without waiting for a distant ribbon-cutting ceremony. As part of the Community Parks Initiative, DPR agreed to carry out smaller-scale physical improvement projects that could be completed on a faster schedule and bring immediate results. The targeted improvements including: repainting play equipment and handball courts, repairing benches, and improving horticultural areas. The targeted improvement program (\$2.15 million total) also cost just a fraction of what was spent on CPI capital renovations (\$130 million). Targeted improvements were only 1.6% of the overall 2015 Community Parks Initiative budget.

After looking at these numbers, I wanted to see whether the CPI targeted improvement program was successful in bringing immediate improvement to struggling parks. Did a coat of paint, planting flowers, and garbage removal provide a quick turnaround for these parks? If so, this program could serve as a model for future investment. While it's great for DPR to build a new imaginative playground with all the bells and whistles, it's also important for all

The writer uses specific data to illustrate the problem. Charts and/or graphs could also be useful here.

By mentioning this governmental department early on (as well as the Mayor and the NYC Parks Commissioner in the paragraph above), readers begin to get a sense of this Capstone's policy network.

Here the writer details the policy response to the problem, emphasizing the specific aspect of the response that this Capstone will focus on.

This sentence begins to lay out why this particular policy response is important to evaluate.

Here the writer addresses the research questions guiding the study. Note that the writer is using the past tense to refer to the questions, rather than the future tense (which they may have used in

parks to be clean, safe, and attractive every day. And with the reality of shrinking city budgets, it might be worthwhile for park departments around the country to spend a little less on capital construction and a little more on targeted maintenance.

Community parks are an important part of our daily lives. Many communities don't have quick access to flagship parks like Central Park in Manhattan or Prospect Park in Brooklyn. They rely on small neighborhood parks for a daily dose of green space. The current New York City administration is laser focused on issues of inequality, and this relates to broader trends across the country, where inequality is now frequently debated and lamented. Benefits created by park spaces need to be equally accessible to all New Yorkers, regardless of income or location. Providing targeted improvements to hundreds of parks across the city could be a better investment than funding a handful of capital projects. This paper explores whether the 2015 targeted improvement plan worked for New York City's 55 CPI parks. My analysis finds that the CPI program really did manage to provide immediate improvement to some of New York City's struggling parks, and the plan should serve as a model for future investment.

their proposal or problem statement).

The writer gives a longer rationale for the study. They position the study within larger themes and conversations around the topic that we will expect to find explored in-depth in the literature review.

A very quick summary/preview of what the Capstone does and its findings. Note that this is not very detailed: a reader will expect more specific information in the methodology and findings/discussion sections.

### **Useful templates and phrases for the Introduction**

“After looking at these numbers, I wanted to see/After examining the data, I wanted to know/The data presented the following questions....”

“This paper explores/studies/analyzes....”

“My analysis finds/proves/suggests....”

### **Further resources**

“Academic Phrasebank,” University of Manchester, <http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>, (see especially “Introducing Work,” “Defining Terms” and “Signaling Transition”).