



Wisconsin
Evaluation
Collaborative

ACP Final Projects

for Wisconsin educators | November 2019



Information

About the Author

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About the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative

The Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) is housed at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. WEC's team of evaluators supports youth-serving organizations and initiatives through culturally responsive and rigorous program evaluation. Learn more at <http://www.wec.wceruw.org>.

Acknowledgements

WEC would like to thank all the participant schools, teachers, administrators, students, and community members for their time, perspectives, and expertise as well as the ACP team at DPI. The author would also like to thank the other WEC evaluators who conducted site visits: Jessica Arrigoni, JourneyBrown Henderson, Dan Marlin, and Jenn Vadas.

Learn More

Additional resources pertaining to ACP Final Projects such as rubrics, interview questions, and presentation guidelines are available online at <http://wec.wceruw.org/acp-study/>. For more information about WEC's ongoing evaluation of ACP, contact the Principal Investigator, Robin Worth, robin.worth@wisc.edu

TESTIMONIALS

Baraboo High School Teacher

"It provides the students who are not the 4.0 students but who do have accomplishments to showcase them. For example the student who works from 10-12 every night and then comes back to school, another student talked about her ability to do school without internet at home. There's the possibility to get recognition for having grit and perseverance, beyond grades, and a work ethic and feedback on how essential that is."

Cambridge High School Student

"[The interviewers] said at the end that I had a calm confidence and I didn't know that about myself."

Antigo High School Teacher

"They are talking with employers that want to employ them. That is huge. They could walk out and get a call asking if they want to do an apprenticeship."

Barron High School Senior

"You're told your freshman year, you need to keep all this important stuff. When you get to your senior year, finally being like, wow, my freshman year I was this, and my senior year I'm this, the realization you have come so far, also really makes the portfolio worth it in the end."

Introduction

Academic and Career Planning (ACP) is Wisconsin's program to equip students in grades 6-12 with the tools necessary to make informed, career-based choices about postsecondary education and training. A group of researchers from the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison traveled across the state to learn how districts and schools implement one aspect of ACP: student **Final Projects**. WEC staff visited 10 different Wisconsin schools to observe Final Projects and talk with ACP coordinators, principals, counselors, teachers, students, and community members. The broad consensus was that Final Projects were a valuable part of ACP.

Although the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has provided recommendations and requirements for ACP, districts and schools design their ACP programs to be context-specific; that is, to implement a scope and sequence of activities that is most appropriate for the learners in that particular school, district, and community. Consequently, ACP programming can look quite different across the state. This brief shares the information learned from the schools about the varieties of Final Projects so that educators can consider adding this best practice to their school/district's ACP scope and sequence.

Final Projects

ACP Final Projects are a type of "capstone" activity that a number of schools around the state have designed, adopted, or adapted to help prepare students for their futures. ACP Final Projects are one of the ACP "Powerful Practices," along with Job Shadowing, Resume-Building, One-on-One Conferencing, and Mock Interviewing. Students, educators, and family and community members identified "Powerful Practices" as particularly valuable components in the ACP array of activities, **with students most often naming Final Projects as the most beneficial ACP-related activity**, along with Job Shadowing.

Although the specifics of Final Projects vary between schools, they can generally be categorized as a presentation, an exit interview, or a hybrid of the two. Many include a student portfolio, which is typically based on students' ACP work over time. Schools often create a checklist of required or recommended components to be included in the portfolio, with some sort of teacher review process before the date of the Final Project interview or presentation.

Interviews typically involve the review of students' portfolios by interviewers, whether prior to or during the actual interview.

Interviewers may include a combination of teachers, district staff, and community members. Interviews typically last between 10 and 20 minutes with students having an opportunity to respond to questions about their portfolio and future plans. In some schools, students are purposefully paired with interviewers based on areas of interest so that students can make community connections and have a conversation with someone in a related field.

Presentations typically involve a review of the student's portfolio with a chance for audience questions at the conclusion. Audiences for presentations range from small to large groups of peers, teachers, and family and/or community members.

“I think it’s a great opportunity for the kids to get a chance to see what an interview is going to look like. And have them be put on the spot and have to actually think about this stuff.”

- Testimonial from a Mosinee Community Member Interviewer

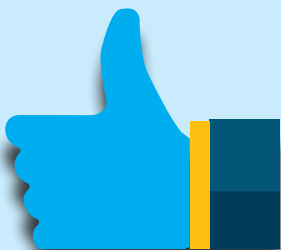
Most Final Projects take place toward the end of senior year, sometimes during the school day and sometimes in the evening. There are a variety of processes for determining interviewers and/or audience members; in some cases they are invited, selected, or scheduled by the students, and in other cases they are assigned or chosen randomly. Providing students with written feedback is typically a component of Final Projects; in most cases, districts created feedback forms for participants to use. Final Projects are sometimes required for graduation and may or may not be graded. Students in other grades may be involved as audience members, or may be participating in other grade-level activities, often connected to ACP. The key components of each visited school's Final Project are shown in the following Case Study Schools table.

Case Study Schools

ACP Final Projects

SCHOOL	FINAL PROJECT NAME/TYPE	GRADE LEVEL	REQUIRED FOR GRADUATION?	WHEN ACTIVITY OCCURS	LENGTH	WHO ELSE PARTICIPATES	STUDENTS IN OTHER GRADES INVOLVED?	GOALS/PURPOSE	WHERE/WHEN STUDENTS PREPARE	HOW MANY YEARS IN PLACE?
ABBOTSFORD HS	Senior presentation	12	Yes	Early May, during school day	20 minute blocks	Administrator, counselor, and a teacher whom the student needs to contact to schedule in order to practice appointment making skills	Students in grades 6-11 do smaller end-of-year presentations for their classmates in homeroom	Self-reflection and analysis of life goals, showcase HS achievements, future plans, where to find resources to help meet goals, accountability	Builds from MS through HS, during weekly half-hour ACP instruction	ACP-like activities for several years, began senior presentations 2 years ago
ANTIGO HS	Portfolio presentation	12	Yes	Spring, after school - 3:30 - 6:30 pm	15 minutes per student	Teachers, community members, school board members, parents	Seniors required to practice presentations 2x before the final presentations, either in their mixed grade homerooms or in front of a teacher. Food science students prepare food for the evening	Presentation practice, showcase HS achievements and share their plans and goals. Developing connections with community members in related career areas	Many activities built into English classes (career research report, interviews, resumes) and most other activities completed in advisory time when dedicated to ACP	2
BARABOO HS	Exit interview using portfolio	12	Yes	Late spring, entire morning during a school day	20 minutes per student	Interviews are conducted by a community member and a district staff person	No	Interview experience, showcase HS achievements, discuss future plans, get feedback from community members and teachers, build relationships, accountability	Dedicated time in homeroom	2018-19 is first full year, small scale pilot in 2017-18, conducted interviews for December graduates during 1st semester
BARRON HS	"Senior Exposition" / presentation using portfolio	12	Yes	Early April, during school day in advisory period	Can last up to 30 minutes	3 evaluators per presentation (community members, local professionals)	Students practice presenting to underclass during "resource" (homeroom) periods	Handbook: "The purpose of the Senior Exposition is for each student to present a collection of materials that reflects their academic progress, personal development, future aspirations and dreams."	Goal-setting discussed during resource period throughout HS. Contents of portfolio are built through HS	Many, "long before ACP"
BLACK RIVER FALLS HS	Senior Exit Presentation	12	No	Late spring at the beginning of the school day	Approximately 5 minutes	Advisory teacher and classmates (9-12 graders) plus 8th graders/rising freshmen	Students remain in the same advisory group from 9th-12th grade and comprise the presentation audience	Showcase HS achievements, reflection, report future goals, give advice to younger students	During advisory periods	Unclear, but was in place before district ACP plan was developed
CAMBRIDGE HS	Exit Interview with portfolio	12	Yes	Late spring, during the school day	30 minute intervals, interviews last 10-15 minutes, students exit while interviewers discuss feedback, students return to receive feedback	Volunteer community members (business leaders, school board members, superintendent, retired teachers)	No	Interview experience, showcase HS achievements, discuss their future plans, receive feedback from community members, accountability	ACP work in sophomore Careers Class, throughout HS in other courses, and have 2 dedicated days to prepare portfolio during senior year	20+
JUDA SCHOOL	Portfolio presentation	12	Yes	Early May, during the school day	15 minute presentations	2-3 participants: teachers, superintendent/principal	Not in the presentations, but portfolios are built over several years	Presentation experience, showcase HS achievements, future plans, accountability	Work on ACP during Flex time, a 35-minute general resource period. Senior Seminar in 1st semester includes cover letters and resumes	4
MOSINEE HS	Exit interview with portfolio	12	Yes	Spring, daylong, during school day, part of Careers in Action Day	Interviews in half-hour increments throughout the day; otherwise seniors are participating in Real Life Academy	Community members (as interviewers), approximately 40 stations with 2 interviewers at each	No. 9th and 10th graders taking ACT Aspire exam, 11th graders doing job visits in the community	Interview experience, showcase HS work, make community connections, accountability	Portfolios created, interviewing practiced in senior "Discovering Your Career" course during 1st semester. ACP work done in monthly homerooms	15
NORTHLAND PINES MS	Choice Careers career exploration poster presentation	8	NA	Late May, during the school day, 2:30-3:30	1 hour	7th graders also display posters about personal interests (Passion Project), HS students attend, families, community members. Several judges (principal, some staff and visitors) complete rubrics for feedback and nominate one 7th and one 8th grader for "Best of Show."	Yes, as an audience	Demonstrate research on careers of interest, showcase interests, practice presenting, accountability	Research and presentation boards completed in computers/ ACP class, bibliographies completed in English Language Arts	Passion Project has been in place for several years, but the switch to Choice Careers occurred in 2017-18.
WHITEWATER HS	Senior portfolio presentation	12	Yes	Late May, 1-3:30 pm on a school day, half-hour increments in classrooms around the school	Each presentation about 20 minutes followed by questions and answers	Community members, staff, other students in the audience, family and any other guests invited by students	As audience, select seniors give presentations in the auditorium for large groups of other HS grade levels	Showcase HS achievements, present their post-HS plan, reflect on experiences, presentation experience, offer advice to younger students, accountability	Portfolio created throughout senior year in homeroom, speech and slideshow are created in speech class.	9-10 years

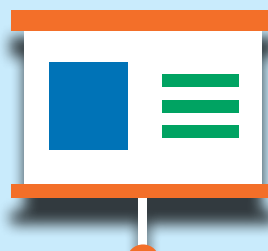
Benefits of Final Projects



1.

Recognition

Allowing students to showcase their school and work experiences and plans.



2.

Practical Experience

Providing the opportunity for students to gain interview and/or presentation experience.



3.

Accountability

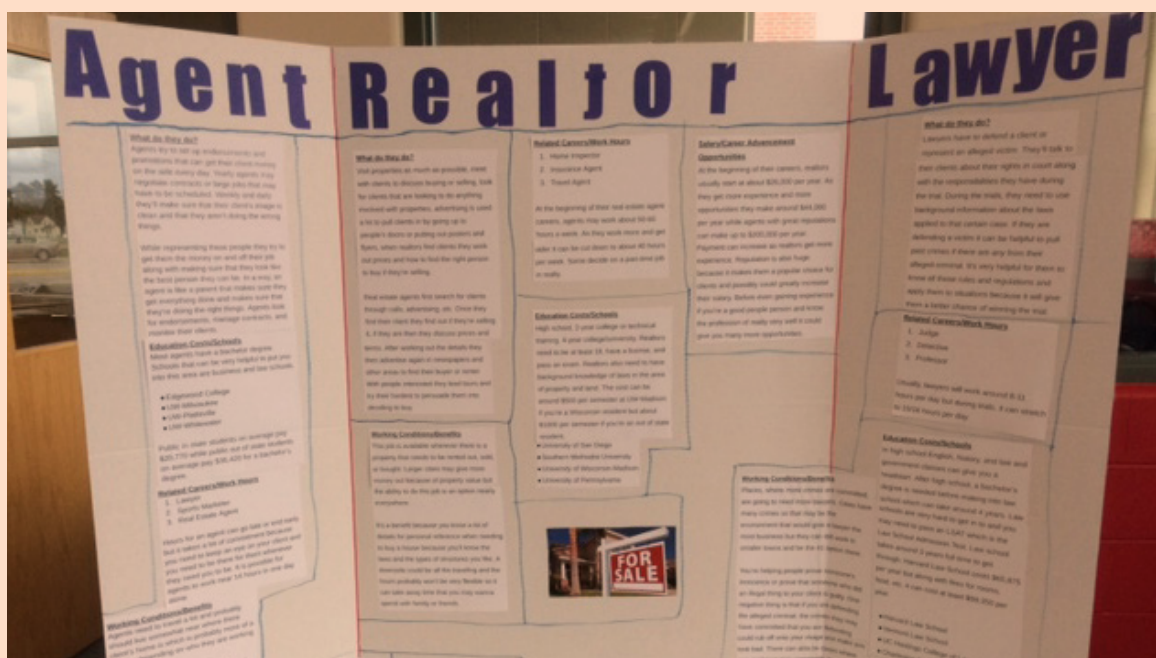
A means to compel students to take ACP (and planning for the future) more seriously.



4.

Relationship Building

Providing opportunities for and capitalizing on relationships between students, schools, educators, families, community members, and employers.



EXAMPLE OF A STUDENT POSTER FROM NORTHLAND PINES MIDDLE SCHOOL

Middle School Final Project

All but one of the Final Projects described involved high school seniors. Northland Pines Middle School, however, developed a final project for eighth graders. Their final project addresses common challenges, particularly the struggle to get students in middle grades to take seriously the career exploration activities, interest inventories, and other ACP-related activities typical for that age group. Held for one hour during a school day, eighth graders present findings of career exploration on tri-fold presentation boards to other students, teachers, families, community members, and several judges (teachers and community members) who provide feedback using a rubric. Students select three of the top ten careers that they were matched with when completing a career matching activity, or two matched careers and an additional career of interest,

and create poster presentations that indicate typical job responsibilities, pay ranges, education and training needed, information about several post-secondary institutions that provide the needed training, and more. Held in a large commons area, observers are free to ask questions of the students about their boards; and students, who have prepared and practiced responses to common questions, talk about their findings. Judges nominate presenters for a “Best of Show” award. The work to prepare the boards is completed in the required computers class, which is taught by the school’s ACP coordinator, as well as in English Language Arts, where the bibliographies for their research are prepared. The rationale for this activity is similar to that of the high school-level activities, but is particularly geared toward the element of student accountability, as well as setting expectations for further ACP work in high school and contributing to the strong culture of ACP that this district prioritizes. Students whom WEC talked to took the activity seriously, were well informed, and were articulate when speaking about careers that they had researched.

Best Practice: Evaluate Your Program

Some of these schools have been implementing their Final Projects, or some version of them as they evolve over time, for many years. Schools with a long history of doing Final Projects have revised them over time, with some form of evaluation process in place to inform revisions and updates. Schools that have more recently adopted Final Projects often modeled their work on examples from other districts, and also have evaluative processes that they use to refine their projects. All schools, whether they have been refining their Final Projects over time or have recently adapted them from other districts, reported that it takes time to develop these activities. In other words, Final Projects are unlikely to function flawlessly in the first year(s) of implementation, but with a continuous improvement process in place, they can evolve to be a Powerful Practice that helps to address a number of important goals of ACP work.

Successes and Challenges

Final Projects were seen as successful for many reasons. Students often reported valuing the interview process and experience, as well as getting feedback, particularly from community members and others besides their teachers. Administrators liked seeing the “finished product” of their school system, i.e., what graduating seniors have learned and accomplished. Teachers tended to value the reflective element – hearing what students derived from their high school educations, particularly those students who tend to be less visible in school. People in various school staff roles noted the importance of student accountability; that is, a means for having students take the ACP process more seriously. Community members appreciated the opportunity to learn more about their local schools, and those serving as interviewers appreciated being involved in the process.

As one community member interviewer explained,

“It makes us feel like we’re involved in the school, offer support, take kids’ plans seriously. To give back to the community or school. To support the kids. Board members should do it to get into schools so they know what they’re talking about and voting on, and can SEE the issues that they discuss.”

Community member audience participants or interviewers were enthusiastic and supportive; moreover, students appreciated the presence of these stakeholders. Generally speaking, participating students viewed Final Projects that included external audiences more positively. Other benefits named included networking with local businesses and financial literacy, when those were part of the curriculum or project.

Reactions to the eighth-grade final project were similar to that of high school Final Projects, with a few age-relevant additions. School counselors reported that students have more “ownership over their careers” and that they learn important concepts and vocabulary such as “bachelor’s degrees” and “associate degree.” Students taking career exploration and then the resulting classes more seriously was a strong theme among teachers and leaders in this school. One teacher reported that when middle school students take ACP work more seriously, it “will result in better work at the high school level, if they’re held responsible for what they put into [middle school career exploration activities].”

Challenges and drawbacks for Final Projects were relatively few, but educators are advised to avoid excessive “paperwork or busywork” associated with creating portfolios, and to provide sufficient time for preparation. Most challenges were reported in schools new to the process, and schools that had longer histories of doing Final Projects reported that complaints and student or teacher pushback waned over time. Students in schools who presented only to teachers often wished that external audiences could be involved. Although students often talked about being nervous before Final Projects or worried about their grades, afterwards, they typically reported that it was “worth it” and that they need not have been nervous because interviewers and audience members were supportive, kind, engaged, and positive.

WEC

Supporting PreK-12

