



## ***From classroom to career: Verona Township supports 16 VHS Students in the Capstone Intern Program***

June 13, 2024

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Since 2015, Verona High School has offered the graduating seniors the opportunity to participate in an internship program, known as Senior Capstone. The Capstone program is an immersive program that allows students to participate in an internship in a field relating to their post-graduation plans and aspirations. This allows them to gain hands-on experience in an industry of their choice. Their experience culminates into a final paper, in which they outline what they have learned and how it will carry into their college education. From its humble beginnings, it has grown into a widely anticipated period of everyone's senior year. The program has grown rapidly since inception, with about 90% of Seniors participating. The Senior Capstone program is unique to the Verona District, however there are similar programs at other schools in the country.

With a large majority of graduating seniors looking to study fields like business, finance, computer science, and media marketing, this made Verona Township an intriguing opportunity for their capstone internships. Robert Orr, who has been one of the advisors of the Capstone Program for 2 years now, says, "The program does an excellent job giving seniors real-world experience before graduating high school, a head start over their peers attending a high school where a program like this does not exist,". The relative proximity between students and their working locations also makes it a popular choice. This year the Township of Verona has 16 students conducting internships in a variety of roles, from Public Safety to Public Information. The advisors of the capstone program, Robert Orr and Andrew Herschman have helped many students find their capstone locations by discussing their aspiring career path and providing them with contact information.

Prior to internship locations being able to host the Capstone Program, VHS advisors are responsible for visiting, signing off locations, and maintaining logs for hours for all 140 Verona seniors participating in the program. Second year advisor, Andrew Herschman, said of the program, "I think it's a really incredible opportunity for seniors. I love the idea of them being able to experience the working world before college. The reality of a job can look very different from the expectations that students have, so getting exposure to that before college can help to narrow down major choices and future internship choices while in college."



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The senior students themselves are very excited to get the opportunity to participate in a program that allows them to get a first experience in their aspiring career paths. Senior at Verona High School, Marni Shepard, who is capstone with Town Clerk Jen Kiernan at Town Hall, said of her upcoming plans, "After capstone I plan on attending The George Washington University for political science and a possible minor in public policy. I hope to get out of my capstone a new appreciation for the government and for the people working behind the scenes. I wish to obtain better communication skills, connections, and professionalism." Ian Zalewski, a VHS Senior majoring in computer science at Lehigh University in the Fall, was asked "What are you looking to gain from this experience?" He responded, "Actual real-world experience. I've done programming projects before on my own, but there's not much I can learn about people. In the real world, you have to work a lot with people and try to figure out how to do everything in a team. On top of that, just learning how different systems work."

Under the guidance of Verona's Municipal Clerk, Jennifer Kiernan, nine of the Seniors participating in Capstone at the township participated in a mock council meeting to learn more about the process of implementing resolutions within the township's government. The interns were assigned the roles of council members, residents, and department heads. The mock meeting agenda included a resolution of a town curfew. They went through the motions of a town meeting, each embodying their role. The residents came up during public comment attempting to sway the council. The department heads gave their input of concerns and how it could potentially affect their department, the Town Clerk guided the meeting, and the council members discussed and voted on the Resolutions as well as several ordinances. In the end, the council came to a unison vote against a town curfew. Here you can see the [agenda](#) from the mock council meeting. This mock council meeting, which can be viewed on [Verona's YouTube channel](#), provided the students with an active hands-on learning experience of how to efficiently and respectfully communicate in a professional setting, make collaborative decisions, and expand their knowledge of government procedures.



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The students will be able to take these skills, as well as everything else they learned and experienced during their four weeks of Capstone with them to college as well as their future careers. Verona's Capstone program truly brings out the ambition, passion, and good work ethic within the students, to better prepare them for the real working world!

Written by Interns Abby Shust and Luca Tedesco, Office of Public

*Special thank you to the participating township departments: Administration, Community Services and Recreation, Finance, IT, Library, Municipal Clerk, Public Information, Police Department, Fire Department and Rescue Squad.*