

## What the GradProject IS:

- An opportunity for students to develop “communication, problem-solving, technical and critical-thinking skills, which are necessary for a successful transition to the adult world.” [Bottoms, 1998]
- An opportunity for students to interact with and give back to their community
- An opportunity for the community to take part in the immediate education of youth outside of the classroom
- An opportunity for students to explore possible future career choices
- An opportunity for students to collaborate with professionals outside of the classroom
- An opportunity for students to experience success in their area of interest
- An opportunity for students to become accomplished in producing, creating and presenting quality work
- An opportunity for the adults in a student’s life to connect with their child in regard to their larger world view

## What the GradProject IS NOT:

- Only for the student
- A parent project
- A group project
- An eighteen week classroom project
- A catalyst for student anxiety and stress
- Judged upon a student’s academic, honors or AP status
- A task that can be completed via mundane tasks at a dispassionate organization
- A means of disparagement for a student with perceived weaknesses
- Overwhelmingly time consuming and financially draining

## Bibliography

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## What our graduates have to say:



### More from Southeast Alumni:

*To communicate effectively- straight, professional, to the point- is vital. [The GradProject provides this] valuable skill.*  
– M. Wong, 2012

*It helped me become more confident with presenting in front of people, [and] in the work that I have done. This was probably the best college prep that I could have gotten through high school.*

– P. Zielinski, 2014

*I can't imagine going through senior year without [doing] the GradProject. It puts Southeast students ahead of the ball game in so many respects*

– R. Gupta, 2011

*The GradProject gave me the first opportunity in school to question why [and] made me ask the most important questions that focused and formatted the presentation.*

– W. Francis, 2011

*The GradProject really helped me understand [the process] of picking an area of study, researching topics, and narrowing my field. Without having done this capstone requirement, I wouldn't [have] had the confidence to submit a (successful) research grant to NCSU.*

– D. Koontz, 2012

*[Out] of my whole career as a high school student the only thing that truly came close to college academia was the GradProject.*

– J. Peterkin, 2013

*The GradProject has helped me gain a lot of confidence in public speaking - and even if I was shaking in my shoes [at the time] - I wouldn't trade [the] experience I got from it.*

– M. Bennett, 2014

## OVERVIEW

The GradProject provides students with an authentic assessment of their own ability learn independently. [Darling-Hammond, et.al., 1994; Blanchard, 2012]

A recent SRMHS graduate provided the following insightful analysis of the benefits derived from the GradProject experience:

*Taking a class and studying some semi-relevant subject is fine and good, but near the end of your 13<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of the same, it often fails to provide a singular experience. The way that the GradProject differentiates itself is as an outlet for students to express themselves, to delve deeper into a subject that interests them. There is something hugely satisfying about being able to say [for example] that you put in 25+ hours to help the homeless LGBT community, completed construction of a beautiful custom bass guitar, or converted waste cooking oil into an environmentally friendly diesel alternative. – K. Kennedy, 2012*

After choosing a topic to research:

- the student then poses a question that identifies the specific aspect of the topic, intellectual or societal, that will be the basis for their project.
- the student then compiles and presents their findings to a panel of judges.
- the student must demonstrate both personal and intellectual growth during their presentation in order to pass the project.

## THE COMPONENTS

**The Mentor:** The student must select a mentor to help guide them through the process *in addition to* their Senior English teacher. An active interaction between the student and their mentor is vital for successful completion of the GradProject. [Ancess, 1994]

The mentor ensures that the student:

- selects a sufficiently challenging topic
- crafts an essential question that is focused and relevant to their research
- develops a product that is directly related to their essential question

**The Research:** Research for the GradProject consists of either (1) traditional literature research on a given topic or (2) participating in community service to address a specified societal issue.

- 1) Traditional GradProjects are typically based off of a research paper the student wrote during their Junior year. However, the student is expected to continue to research the topic in order to deepen their level of understanding.
- 2) Service Learning projects still require research into the background of the issue and the organization with which the student will be volunteering. In order to provide a meaningful learning experience, the student is required to spend a minimum of 15 hours volunteering with the organization. As it has been shown that volunteering over an extended period of time affords significantly greater student learning and development [Cervone, 2014], students are strongly encouraged to go beyond the minimum number of hours.

**The Presentation:** The student prepares a presentation that contains their essential question, their thesis statement, background information and the findings from their research or community service that answers the essential question. Students presenting a Traditional GradProject are also required to include an analysis of their findings and draw a conclusion that is linked to their thesis statement. Students presenting a Service Learning GradProject must also address the following questions:

- a) how they will sustain the project after graduation
- b) the most important lesson learned
- c) how the organization benefitted from their service

*The greatest benefit from the GradProject was definitely proper researching techniques, [and] presentation DOs and DON'Ts.*

– T. Warren, 2011

**The Product:** The product is a physical manifestation of the student's GradProject experience. For the Traditional GradProjects, students may build models, websites, write computer programs etc. as evidence of their research findings. In the picture below, the student build a scale model of a Martian habitat as part of her project on space exploration.



– Mars Habitat built by C. Detelich, 2014

For the Service Learning projects, the students collect artifacts that demonstrate personal involvement and providing service to the organization. Examples of artifacts are pictures, lesson plans, student work if working with children, or student-designed websites and brochures that benefit the organization.

*It serves as fantastic motivation to get out in the community and do something outside of the classroom/textbook.*

– J. Campbell, 2012

### The Grand Finale: The Formal Presentation

The final component to the GradProject is a formal, twenty minute presentation before a panel of judges consisting of teachers, members of the community and business leaders. The student presents their findings and product and then answers questions from the judges. A standardized rubric is used to assess the student's presentation skills and demonstrated depth of knowledge. Of all of the stages of the GradProject, students have found the formal presentation to be the most beneficial and the most intrinsically rewarding. [Blanchard, 2012]